FROM THE PEW TO THE "PULPIT":
THE EXCLUSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN FROM ORDAINED MINISTRY POSITIONS IN THE BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH

A Professional Project

presented to

the Faculty of

Claremont School of Theology

in partial fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

William A. Jones

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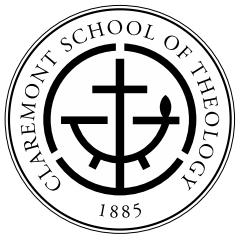

This professional project completed by

WILLIAM A. JONES

has been presented to and accepted by
the Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology
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of the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Dr. Nicholas Grier, Chairperson

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ABSTRACT

FROM THE PEW TO THE "PULPIT": THE EXCLUSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN FROM ORDAINED MINISTRY POSITIONS IN THE BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH

William Jones

This project seeks to review and respond to the teachings, traditions, and practices in traditional Black Baptist Churches which have led to the exclusion of women from ordained ministry, as well as from ecclesial practices such as pastoral leadership and proclamation. For centuries, black women have been overlooked, disrespected, and denied leadership opportunities within many traditional Black Churches by patriarchal leadership. It is hoped that this project will encourage and motivate the silent voices of such oppressed women. These women have sat silently in the pews under the oppression of black male machismo, racism, and sexism, as well as diverse interpretations of biblical texts. This project is designed to look at various factors that have influenced the historical and biblical disclaimers which have restricted African American women for far too long.

The project will explore the narratives of six 21st century Black clergywomen who have been trailblazers for fostering change in the Black Church. This research provides insight into the personal paths of clergywomen in leadership and how they have managed to crack the proverbial stained-glass ceiling of oppression. These women serve as pastors, bishops, and in other leadership positions that were once restricted by male dominance. After reading the narratives of these six clergywomen, it is my desire that women who have sat silently will feel empowered to step out in their calling and recognize the gifts within to serve. It is my desire that

clergymen and the church will develop a supportive spirit to uplift and encourage these women as they flourish into effective leaders within the church.

Dedication

I humbly dedicate my practical research project to Mary E. Jones, my mother, whose words of encouragement and her push for excellence shall forever ring in my ear. My mother epitomized the essence of strength, resilience, and tenacity as referenced by Walker-Barnes in her descriptive narrative of a "cojourner" woman. My mother's dedication to God and family was fueled by her desire to follow God's will. Her persistent nature assisted her in overcoming many adversities and obstacles. My mother took her journey so that my journey could be marked by success and achievement.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful for the grace of God and the thoughts and plans you have for me that carried me through this challenging process.

My achievement of this milestone would not have been possible without the encouragement, prayers, motivation, and support of faculty, family, and friends who assisted me through this laborious process.

To my advisors and Claremont faculty, Dr Nicholas Grier, Dr Lincoln E. Galloway, Dr. Frank Rogers, and Kirianna Florez. Thanks for your support and expertise throughout this process.

I am eternally grateful to my sister Dr. Carol Williams, Bishop Kenneth Ulmer, Marilyn Odom, Robert McDonald, Felica Jones, and Olivia Hilburn, whose generosity and patience encouraged me through this journey.

A special thanks to my wonderful, intelligent, and kind wife Desserie who spent tireless nights editing my work. Thanks for believing in me, your love and support made completing this academic work possible. Also, to my children Joshua and Zoe, you have been an inspiration to keep me working and believing that *all things are possible if you only believe*.

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Introduction

Problem

This paper examines the disproportionate number of women who have been excluded from ordained ministry positions in traditional Black Baptist churches. Tiffany Thomas, in her analysis of the legacy of women in the black Church states, "Black women have a long and intricate history with the church. Women, making up 70 to 90 percent of black congregations, have always found the institution of the church a place of refuge, of solace and hope."[1] In her 2022 dissertation, Cornelia Meeks further adds to that analysis that black women "are disproportionately underrepresented in Black Church leadership in congregations interdenominationally."[2] Women historically have been involved in the work of the Church; however, there still remain a distinction in achieving leadership equality within Black Baptist church structure.

Response to the Need

This project seeks to review and respond to the teachings, traditions, and practices in black Baptist churches which have led to the exclusion of women from ordained ministry as well as from other ecclesial practices such as pastoral leadership and proclamation.

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[1] Tiffany Thomas, "The Legacy of Women in the Black Church," Womenleaders.com, Christianity Today, February 11, 2016. https://www.christianitytoday.com/women-leaders/2016/february/legacy-of-women-in-black-church.html.

[2] Cornelia A. Meeks, "Cracking The Stained-Glass Ceiling: Leadership Experiences of Black Clergywomen in the Black Church" (EdD diss., Northeastern University, 2020), 7. https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:m045xp18z.

Significance of the Problem

Many black Baptist churches have maintained the practice of excluding women from ordained ministry and other ecclesial practices, such as pastoral leadership and proclamation of the Word (Bible). I grew up attending a traditional black Baptist church where 87% of the congregation's members were women; it was not obvious to me at the time that the leadership of the Church was male dominant and had excluded women from ministry or other pastoral position. What I observed in the Black Baptist Churches was a sexist, patriarchal structure that marginalized the contributions of women in the church. This structure motivated women to fight against the negative stereotypes and various forms of gender oppression that have taken place in the church and in society.

Although Black Churches throughout history have been advocates for justice and equality for Black Americans, greater inclusion of Black women within traditional Black Churches remains a controversial issue. Many African American women have found the Black Church to be a sexist environment that perpetuates the oppression of black women; thus, it causes them to leave the traditional Black Church and transition to environments where they have the latitude to exercise their spiritual calling in ministry. While this is happening, men are typically the leaders of the black Baptist church and have continued to lead from a patriarchal viewpoint which refuses to accept that women can be their equal in all aspects of the Church, from the pew to the pulpit.

The task of responding to this problem will be accomplished by reviewing the historical background of the Black Baptist Church, as well the effects of slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation, white supremacy, the National Baptist Convention, and the Civil Rights

Movement on the church. After the historical review, I will consider Biblical interpretations and commentary which either justify exclusion or offer support for the inclusion of women in ministry.

Justification

When I started the doctoral program at Claremont School of Theology, I was introduced to the growing field of Womanist theology. Womanist theology encourages the church to reexamine the traditional understanding of biblical teachings that it has held for a long time. Traditionally, African American women have suffered from diversely interpreted biblical teaching regarding women in ministry. I came to understand its profound significance as I reflected critically on black women's experience in society and their contribution to the African American Church. The more I studied the field of Womanist theology, the more I became convinced that the conversation regarding exclusion of women in ministry is necessary. Womanist theology stresses the advantage of working with, rather than against men in order to improve the entire community.

Audience

The primary audience for this DMin project is those pastors and other religious leaders who are committed to examining practices in their churches which negatively affect the call of women to ministry. This project can also be utilized by individuals who lead Bible studies and discussion groups that focus on the role of women in ministry. It is my desire that this project will prompt discussion, broaden Biblical interpretation, and challenge traditional practices of black Baptist clergymen who have excluded women from positions of ordained ministry.

Theological and Theoretical Framework

It is my deepest conviction that the evidence of Scripture, coupled with different interpretations should prompt clergymen and churches to examine their traditional practices that have excluded women in ministry. In evaluating this traditional practice, we must redefine the comprehensive role of women in the Bible. Women have made exceptional contributions to the African American Church throughout its history; however, their role as ministers or ordained pastors hasn't been free from scrutiny in the traditional Black Baptist church, being met with scrutiny, resistance, and even out right contempt.

Throughout the biblical texts, there are significant teachings that are foundational for the inclusion of women in ministry in the body of Christ. In the opening chapter of Genesis, God creates men and women after His image. First, man (Adam), a universal term meaning the "human person," is formed in Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–2. In God's image, we see both male ('*ish*) and female ('*ishshah*) - which suggests a mutuality of men and women. This does not suggest a male headship or female submission. Humankind as a whole was given dominion over the earth or stewardship of the earth that should not be interpreted to mean that a man has "dominion" over a woman. Some have interpreted Genesis 2:23, in which the man calls the women "bones of my bones and flesh of my flesh," as an indication that men have authority over women. However, such identification does not occur until after the fall when "Adam named his wife Eve" in Genesis 3:20. Genesis 2 discusses woman in *partnership* with man: "The word "helper,"

then, is not to be understood as an expression of submission and service to man; rather, the woman as helper serves God with man."[3]

Paul recognized the importance of women serving in leadership position and this was evident in a number of churches, including Philippi, Thessalonica, Caesarea, and Rome. Mary Mowczko discusses women in leadership in the church at Philippi, writes, "it was not unusual for women to have leading roles in Philippi. Philippi was the chief city of Macedonia in Acts 16:12, and it has been well documented that Macedonian women enjoyed greater freedoms, rights and powers than many other women of that time."[4]

It is perplexing to me that most traditional church leaders give such credence to 1 Timothy 2, when a large proportion of Scripture supported equality. For example, Paul preached on the importance of equality in the body of Christ in Galatians. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NKJV). This verse demonstrates that *all* Christians were created equally as "children of God," regardless of their sex, race, or social status. They stand as children created by God. Galatians 3:28, like Acts 2, has been utilized to support women in ministry. Those who oppose women in ministry have suggested that Galatians 3:28 is discussing equal

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[3] David M. Scholer, "A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership: Women and Men in the Ministry of the Church," In *Women in Ministry: A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership* (Fuller Seminary, 2018), 4, https://www.fuller.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Women-in-Ministry-A-Biblical-Basis-for-Equal-Partnership.pdf.

[4] Marg Mowczko, "Euodia and Syntyche: Women Church Leaders at Philippi," Marg Mowczko.com, Marg Mowczko, August 4, 2011, https://margmowczko.com/euodia-and-syntyche-church-leaders-at-philippi/.

access to God through faith in Christ Jesus. Even if the text does have other implications, it clearly embraces other possibilities for the full inclusion of women.

Paul's discussion regarding male and female roles had ramifications for the life of the Christ church. It was never to disregard the differences God created in male and female, but sexuality does not determine the degree of involvement in Christ's Church. Paul emphasized equality in his teachings and his letters, discussing women by name who assisted him in ministry. For centuries, Paul's teachings in the New Testament have been abandoned regarding the participation of women in ministry. For example, there were several women of whom Paul spoke who held leadership positions, such as: Phoebe, who served as a deaconess and taught in the Cenchreae church; Junia, who was among the circle of the apostles and was considered outstanding by Paul; Chloe, Nympha, and Apphia all led house churches.

These are all examples of prominent women in the New Testament who held leadership positions in Christ's Church. God's respect for a person is not limited to gender when it comes to using people in the Body of Christ. Given that there is biblical and contemporary evidence that God calls and equips women for ministry, why is it that there are Black clergy who have difficulty recognizing the significance of everyone in the body of Christ being used in ministry within the church?

My theological insights will be illustrated through "womanist theology." First coined in 1983 by Alice Walker, the term "womanist" provided a framework that could be used by women of color to delineate themselves from the white feminist movement. In her text, *In Search of Our*

Mothers' Garden, Walker provides one womanist approach to the struggles experienced by African American women: "black women in America [call] into question their suppressed role in the African American church, the community, the family, and the larger society."[5] Importantly, "womanist religious reflection is more than mere deconstruction, as Walker states—womanist reflection is "the empowering assertion of the black woman's voice."[6] Though not a definition in any strict sense, Walker provides us insights into what it can mean to be a Womanist.

Womanist Theology embodies the character and effectiveness of black womanhood while promoting solidarity with black men. It also condemns prejudice based on sexism and internalized racism in the black Baptist community. It looks deep into a woman's internal and external beauty which is not based on skin color or other physical attributes. It is a theology of liberation as well as a celebration of the contributions of black women in the Church and throughout society.

Review of Closely Related Literature

Charles Trombley, a noteworthy religions educator, ordained minister, and author of the book *Who Said Women Can't Teach*, presented a compelling theory when he "stated that the basic problem excluding women from ministry stems from Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians

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[5] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 1983), 194.

[6] Walker, *Our Mothers' Gardens*, 204.

14:34, 'Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak."[7] Traditional interpretation of this passage is that women are to remain silent. The point that Trombley brings up is that Paul did not say women should not be permitted to preach or hold the position of a deaconess in the church; rather, Paul said a woman should not speak. Historically, there have been governing bodies and authorities within many black Baptist Churches that have prohibited women from teaching because of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:12. Trombley concluded that "those who cite 1 Corinthians 14 to resist the idea of women as deacons or preachers must also prohibit women from giving the welcome address to visitors, reading weekly announcements or comforting prayers."[8]

Other commentators have stated that Paul was addressing unlearned women in the Church of Corinth, telling them to be quiet during the services and to ask their husbands if they wanted information. Since it was part of Greek and Jewish culture at that time to view women as less than men, their testimony and teaching would largely have been discredited—especially if they were unlearned women. The same seems to be the case in Paul's letter to Timothy, where in Paul was writing to assist Timothy with the difficult task of challenging erroneous doctrinal teaching and practical problems in the Church as Ephesus. It was never Paul's intention to discredit women, but to address the women's behavior at Ephesus. In fact, the word quietly in

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[7] Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1985), 3. The word used by the author of 1 Corinthians is the Greek *upotago*, which means both "silence" and "total submission."

[8] Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach*, 5.

Timothy 2:12 does not mean complete silence. The passage is referring to women having a life without turmoil: "The term requires women to have a 'quiet demeanor and spirit that is peaceable instead of argumentative.'"[9]

In the book *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, Robert D. Culver, Susan T. Foh, Walter L. Liefeld, and Alvera Mickelsen came together to collaborate and challenge the traditional practices in some black Baptist churches that have excluded women ministry based on biblical interpretation. Robert Culver, professor and author of *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical*, challenges what is called the traditional view that women should not exercise authority over or teach men.[10] Susan Foh, author of *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, states that "a distinction must be made between what Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave as tradition and the tradition of the church, unless it can be shown that they are the same supported by Culver."[11] Dr. Walter Liefeld from Columbia University and professor emeritus of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School argues that traditional pastoral ministry in the African American church means complete authority over others and 1

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[9] Denny Burk, "What Does It Mean That Women Should 'Remain Quiet' in Church? (1 Timothy 2)," Crossway, January 19, 2019, www.crossway.org/articles/what-does-it-mean-that-women-should-remain-quiet-in-church-1-timothy-2/.

[10] Robert Culver, "A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence," in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 25-52.

[11] Susan T. Foh, "A Male Leadership Response," in Clouse and Clouse, in *Women in Ministry*: *Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 53-54.

Timothy 2:12 prohibits such authority to women. Liefeld states that "ecclesiastical authority has been seriously challenged recently, since the rare Greek word *authentein* can no longer be understood as equivalent to the common word for exercising authority."[12] Liefeld agrees with Culver's view regarding Paul wanting to maintain differentiations between men and women: "In fact, some suggest that he is concerned with homosexuality or with the ritual sex change done in some pagan rituals."[13] Alvera Mickelsen does not support Culver's traditional views on the grounds that it assumes that both biblical and present traditional practice is good. In the context of interreligious work, Mickelsen states that "both Jesus and Paul clearly understood that tradition can be either good or bad. The right or wrong of tradition did not depend on how many years it had been followed or how many respected teachers of the law promoted it. Rather it depended on what effect that tradition had on human beings who had been created in the image of God and for whom Christ gave his life."[14]

Jesus' life demonstrated that He fought traditional Jewish custom by healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath day and having the disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath. Jesus confronts the Jewish Rabbis on the issue of traditions: "So you nullify the authority of the word of God

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[12] Walter L. Liefeld, "A Plural Ministry Response," in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 55.

[13] Liefeld, "A Plural Ministry Response," 56.

[14] Alvera Mickelsen, "An Egalitarian Response," in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 59.

acting as if it did not apply because of your tradition which has been handed down through the elders" (Mark 7:1-14).

C. Eric Lincoln, author and Professor of Religion and Culture at Duke University and Lawrence H. Mamiya, Associate Professor of Religion and African Studies at Vassar College collaborated by developing a comprehensive historical overview of seven mainline black denominations. They are the authors of *The Black Church in the African American Experience* wherein they elaborate and give examples of women and their struggles to achieve recognition of their calling within the Black Church. In one section of the book, Lincoln and Mamiya briefly examine the movement of black womanist theology and rising trends within black women clergy. They offer a possible explanation for the gender oppression and sexual imbalance that have occurred in the Black Church experience. "Both historical and contemporary evidence underscore the fact that Black Churches could scarcely have survived without the active support of black women, but in spite of their importance in the life of the church, the offices of preacher and pastor of churches in the historic Black Churches remain a male preserve and not generally available to women."[15]

Clinical Psychologist and public theologian Chanequa Walker-Barnes examines the matter of what a strong black woman resembles in her book *Too Heavy a Yoke*. "She demonstrates how the three core features of the ideology, emotional strength, caregiving, and

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[15] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 275.

independence constrain the lives of African American women."[16] Regardless of how black women have been viewed, they have historically been identified as strong and they possess the ability to persevere through suffering by maintaining a strong disposition.

President Emerita of the Ecumenical Theological Seminary and retired AME minster Marsha Foster Boyd, in her essay "Womanist Care," identifies this strong black woman with the powerful term "cojourner" denoting the ability to understand that through one's life, through one's hurts, through one's victories, one has the power to cojourn with others."[17] Since slavery, African Americans have "cojourned" to fight for equality and liberation against the oppressive and clenching hands of white supremacy. Walker-Barnes' references to "cojourner" as a Strong Black woman which caused me to reflect upon my mother Mary Etta Jones, who I considered to a strong black woman. I would describe her as a clever provider who loved her family, independent, innovative, patient, a silent sufferer, self-reliant, and spiritual. This image of a strong black woman has been perpetuated by her foremothers and/ idolized by society.

Black women have been taught to be tenacious, strong, and enduring. With the tenacity to overcome adversity and obstacle without protest. Asking for help is a sign of weakness and could be misconstrued as being vulnerable, which is something they cannot afford. Walker-

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[16] Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 20.

[17] Marsha Foster Boyd, "WomanistCare: Some Reflections on the Pastoral Care and the Transformation of African American Women," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 200.

Barnes states, "the myth of Black women's strength is dangerously seductive in that it imbues Black women with a certain moral and emotional superiority."[18]

Marvin McMickle, Professor of Homiletics at Ashland Theological Seminary, discusses how the status of women in the twenty-first century has fundamentally changed from historical conditions. Women in ancient Jewish/Roman culture were not considered citizens and were labeled as a subordinated group. "The closest comparison might be the status of women today in conservative Islamic Taliban and other enforcers of strict Islamic law known as Sharia Law had their way. The point is clear: We cannot separate the way women in ancient culture were forced to behave from their overall status (or non-status) in those societies."[19]

Associate Professor of Religion, Psychology, and Culture at Vanderbilt University, Dr. Phillis Sheppard, is the author of *Self, Culture, and Other in Womanist Practical Theology*, part of a collection on Black religion, womanist thought, and social justice. Dr. Sheppard stated that "Womanist Theology contributes to the reshaping and expansion of black theology. The term womanist gives voice to African American women."[20] Part of womanist practical theology is to empower Black women with the courage to assert self-worth in a society that caused them to feel vulnerable and shameful due to being victims of oppression. Sheppard also stated that

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[18] Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy*, 20.

[19] Marvin A. McMicken, *Deacons in Today's Black Baptist Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 74.

[20] Phillis I. Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 53.

"Womanist practical theology must recognize the specific needs of the black women, resist the impact of dehumanizing black women, and celebrate the ongoing transformation of black women and the contexts in which they live."[21]

Karoline M. Lewis, Associate Professor, and Chair of Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, "provides theoretical, theological, and practical framework, as well as strategies for flourishing as a woman in ministry. Additionally, she engages in critical reflection on the practice of ministry in light of current feminist theory, biblical interpretation, and experience. Lewis discusses the truth about sexism that must be addressed in today's black Baptist Church."[22]

Dr. Joy Angela DeGruy is a nationally and internationally researcher and educator whose work *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, gave us knowledge on the multifaceted impact of slavery on the African American. "She discusses the role our history has played in producing these negative perceptions, images and behavior we presently see perpetuated by black men and women due to the traumatic effects of slavery."[23]

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[21] Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others*, 187.

[22] Karoline M. Lewis, *She: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 5.

[23] Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Press, 2017), 11.

Methods

My research project will begin with library and computer research that examines the exclusion of African American women from positions of ministry within the Black Baptist Church. The project focuses on the findings of qualitative research by using relevant and recent literature, as well as lectures from professionals in the field of study. Additional data for this study will consist of reviewing narratives and life changing experiences from six African American clergywomen. In addition, the research will utilize literary review, participants' narratives, and secondary resources. While the data will not embody a complete representation, I believe that the data sources will enable me to present a balanced view of the traditional black Baptist Church. My target group will be African American clergywomen, especially pastors, authors, and Bishops. This report will review life experiences from women regarding their education, and the obstacles they have experienced.

The next method used will be an examination of the role of African American women associated with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A, which has historically excluded women as pastors and ordained ministry positions. The Black Baptist denominations, along with the Church of God in Christ and Southern Baptist Convention, are the most conservative and disproportionate regarding the ordination of women. The examination will be biographical in nature, highlighting the lives and work of these pioneering women.

Definitions, Delimitations, and Limitations

For the purposes of this project, **"Church"** will be defined as a religious organization of people who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. "**Christian**" will be defined as a person or group of people who believe in Jesus Christ and has prayed the prayer of salvation to receive

Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their souls from eternal separation from God, as outlined in the Bible, Romans 10:9. "**Black Baptist Church**" will be defined as the body of Christian congregations that minister predominantly to African-Americans. The "**Black Church**" which was formerly known as the Negro Church, is comprised of over nine different entities: "African Methodist Episcopal (AME); African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ); Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME); within the National Baptist Conventions, U.S.A. (NBC); National Baptist Convention of America, (NBCA); Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); Church of God in Christ (COGIC); National Missionary Baptist Convention (NMBC); and Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship (FGBCF)."[24] A "**Call**" is defined as an internal yearning or belief that God wants someone to complete a specific ministry task. The "**Word**" is defined as the Bible. The "**Stained-Glass Ceiling**" exists in organizations where Black clergywomen face obstacles regarding ordination and leadership positions. "These barriers are part of the invisible theology of exclusion which consists of the ambiguous theological interpretations by gender-biased clergymen [who] reduce access to leadership opportunities for clergywomen."[25]

Although it is my hope that this project will be useful to African American men and women in ministry, this project will be limited to churches associated with the National Baptist

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[24] Encyclopedia of African Amerian Culture and History, "Christian Denominations," Encyclopedia.com, accessed January 24, 2022, www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/christian-denominations-independent.

[25] Rufus Burrow, "Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 48, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1307&context=asburyjournal.

Convention. Though parts of this project might be useful to other denominations, the findings will be specific to the traditional Black Baptist Church. There will always be a group of people that thinks that the Bible absolutely prohibits women from positions of ministry within the Church. Others will demand equal rights, categorically denying what the Bible might say. Although a complete paradigm shift cannot be expected in such a short time, the goal is to stimulate discussion that will hopefully broaden the Biblical interpretation regarding women called to ministry.

Project Outline

Chapter One – From slavery to the Church/The role of the women in the church/National Baptist Convention.

This chapter will trace a brief history of the establishment of the Black Church in the African American experience. I will examine how slaves learned about Christianity by attending services led by southern white Quakers who found ways to urge slaves to be loyal and obey their masters. In addition, I will examine traditional values which brought about separatism and oppression of the black women within the Church.

Chapter Two – Biblical background/Historical Trailblazer/Paul's discusses biblical equality/Paul's words to Timothy.

In this chapter, I will examine the teaching of the Apostle Paul regarding biblical and theological texts which some traditional clergy have used to exclude women from positions of ministry within the Church.

Chapter Three – Womanist Theology as a source of Liberation/Womanist Theology

In this chapter, I will provide background information for the philosophical framework of womanist theology. Womanist pastoral theology reflects critically on black women's experience in society and their contribution to the African American Church. Womanist theology includes the emerging voice of African American women who are fighting against the negative stereotypes and various forms of gender oppression that have occurred in the Church and in society. I will examine how womanist theology encourages the Church to re-examine the traditional understanding of the biblical teachings that it has held for a long time.

Chapter Four – We are the Ones we have been waiting for/African American clergywomen experiences.

This chapter will focus on the development and implementation of the project. It will develop summaries and conclude with information gathered from the clergywomen and historical research.

Chapter Five – Conclusions and Future Recommendations/The Four Core modules.

This final chapter will include a proposal for how to continue the dialogue with clergy that will enhance their biblical interpretation of scriptures and increase their knowledge regarding women in ministry.

Chapter One

From Slavery to the Church

The Black Church has deep roots throughout the life and legacy of African Americans, particularly women. Historically, the Black Church has been a place where women have sought serenity, in view of the fact that the role of black women has often been marginalized. According to TeResa Green, "The principal programs of the Black Church rely disproportionately on women for their support and success, all of the traditional Black religious denominations tend to have basically female congregation and mostly male leadership."[26] Yet, the Black Church has remained a place where the role of women in pastoral leadership has been denied, sidelined, and rejected.

From slavery to the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church has served men and women as they fought racism, oppression, and poverty. Many churches have been a gathering place to strategize against the oppressor because of denied access to public places such as restaurants, parks, and libraries.

This project seeks to review and respond to the possible causes that perpetuate a negative connotation which has excluded women from such positions as ordained ministers, pastoral positions, or preaching God's Word in many African American Churches. It is my

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[26] TeResa Green, "A Gendered Spirit: Race, Class, and Sex in the African American Church," *Race, Gender and Class* 10, no. 1 (2003): 115–28. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41675063?item_view=read_online.

belief that the traditional African American Church has allowed their ordination traditions to override the biblical concept of ministry. Modern debate has caused many to fail to recognize the critical issues of ministry as reflected in the Bible.

Being reared in a traditional African American Baptist Church wherein 87% of the congregation was female, it was not obvious to me that the leadership of the Church was male dominant or had excluded women from ministry or pastoral positions. What I observed in the Black Church was a patriarchal structure that marginalized the contributions of women in the Church. This structure resulted in women fighting against the negative stereotypes and various forms of gender oppression that have taken place in the Church and in society. Historically, Black Churches have always been involved in seeking justice and family preservation for African Americans; however, inclusion for African American women seeking to offer pastoral leadership remains a controversial issue. Many African American women have found the Black Church to be a sexist environment that perpetuates oppression against black women, thus causing them to leave the traditional Black Church and transition to environments where they have the latitude to exercise their spiritual calling in ministry.

During slavery, Christianity constituted two stories, one of a people who defined themselves in connection with a supreme power, and the other whose journey had been for freedom and equality in a world that treated the African American as less than human. (There have always been slave rebellions even before enslaved Africans became Christians and some were Muslims and other traditions.) In many cases, it was the Black Church that fueled the fire for slave uprisings and rebellious acts. The Church provided a pulpit for the voices of some such as Nat Turner and W. E. B. Du Bois to fight against oppression and white supremacy. It was the

Church that was the training ground for the abolitionist movement, and the Church supported the Underground Railroad. The Black Church was a place of courage, collective empowerment, and rejuvenation in the struggle against the dominant white culture.

Africans were punished and brutally tortured in 1619 as they were enslaved and brought to America carrying with them diverse religious traditions. There was no single body of religious beliefs identified as "just African." A larger percentage of Africans believed in Islam and Voodoo practices. There were also African tribes that believed in God as the supreme creator. Africans have a rich and diverse history which includes families, cultures, traditions, kingdoms, diverse religions, and contributions to society which originated centuries before Europeans arrived in Africa. "Art, learning, and technology flourished, and Africans were especially skilled with medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. In addition to domestic goods, they made fine luxury items in bronze, ivory, gold, and terracotta for both local use and trade."[27] The Africans were torn from their native land, and from the political, social, religious, and cultural practices that had governed their lives. Once they arrived in America White Quakers utilized Christianity to browbeat the slaves into obeying their masters.

In the book *On the Slave Journey to An Afro-Baptist Faith*, the author states that "throughout the South, had better, it is said that 'if a nigger ain't a Baptist, someone's been

[27] "Africa Before American Slavery," Ferris State University, accessed January 26, 2022, https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/timeline/africa_before.htm.

tampering with his religions."[28] Africans were tortured and tormented, treated like animals, separated from their families, raped and physically and emotionally abused. The life of a slave included being whipped until one's skin peeled off, being worked to exhaustion, being beaten, and deprived of food, and treated as less than livestock. Unfortunately, this was the brutal life of a slave. Slaveholders were never concerned with the slave's salvation or their knowledge of God, and some had doubts about using Christianity to justify slavery. The majority of the Europeans slaveowners lived as a patriarchal society. Some even argued that slavery was the consequence of Adam's fall, claiming that God cursed Ham and his offspring to eternal servitude, and that slavery was a consequence Genesis 9:17-18. However, nowhere in scripture does God approve slavery. There are several scriptures that prohibit the enslavement of others. Exodus says that "whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death" Exodus 21:16, (NKJV). Many questions have arisen as to why enslaved Africans embraced the religion of the white man, who used the Bible to justify the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Surprisingly, many slaves found hope, comfort, and assurance from Christianity and the Bible. They found refuge and determination to be freed one day. Although the majority of slaves could not read the biblical stories of salvation and retribution, they found courage and determination to press on with a religion that will deliver the oppressed. According to Dr.

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[28] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On the Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 102.

Kenneth Ulmer of Faith Central Bible Church in Los Angeles California "slaves learned to worship through songs, before they could read."[29]

Daniel Fountain, author of *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation* points out how "more than thirty years ago, historians such as Albert Raboteau and Mechal Sobel argued that enslaved Africans embraced Christianity in part due to similarities between their traditional religious practices and Christian beliefs. According to this writer, "africanization of Christianity helped slaves cope with the oftentimes brutal conditions of servitude by anchoring their faith in the promises of spiritual freedom and eternal heavenly rest."[30] In addition, Black Christianity provided community, self-worthy, cultural awareness, and self-determination for slaves throughout the antebellum South.

The year 1730 began a period known as one of the "great awakenings," a religious revivalism wherein white abolitionists (Quaker) rose up against slavery and adopted revised moral standards. During this period, many Africans abandoned the dominant religion of their ancestors for a more aristocratic God who offered freedom and immediate salvation. It was during this time that blacks were introduced to the teachings of the Baptist Church. According to Daniel Fountain, "The separatist Baptist revival that began with Shubal Stearns in 1755 not only brought blacks into the new mixed churches, but it also led directly to the first all-black Baptist

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[29] Kenneth Ulmer, phone interview with author, January 21, 2022.

[30] Daniel L. Fountain, *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation: African American Slaves and Christianity, 1830-1870* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 2010), 703.

Congregation."[31] The first independent Black Baptist Church was organized at end of the eighteenth century when blacks were struggling to carve out a religious space in the midst of the southern plantations that defined their lives as slaves. Historically, the Black Church was where males could achieve social status. Besides the Baptists and Methodists, the Black Church was the only other denomination to allow black preachers to become licensed. "African Methodist churches arose in Baltimore, Charleston, and New Orleans. Baltimore was the center of a separatist movement among black Methodists which led to the creation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church."[32]

Many European households during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were following the patriarchal system that generally devalued women's views. For example, women were not allowed to attend or participate in open town meetings or make decisions within Church congregations. Puritan ministers preached male-dominant sermons and utilized scripture to support their patriarchal views. Many of the ministers would utilize scripture to intimidate women with verses such as "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" 1 Corinthians 14:34 (NKJV). If a woman did speak against the patriarchal system, she ran the risk of being exiled from the community. Cornelia Meeks describes women's struggle in terms of breaking a stained-glass ceiling. She writes, "Combining racism, patriarchal narratives and dogma found in Christianity, has resulted

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[31] Fountain, *Slavery*, 704.

[32] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 24.

in Black clergyman adopting the ambivalence, and in some cases hostility, of White clergymen regarding Black women's access to prominent leadership positions in the Black Church."[33] Courtney Lyons also notes that "the results of this type of posture has perpetuated an "extra thick stained-glass ceiling for Black women to access positions of leadership and prominence within the Black Church."[34]

By 1776, Quakers were prohibited from owning slaves, and they petitioned the U.S. Congress for the abolition of slavery. Many white Baptist clergy supported the thought that Christians were equal and created in God's image. This gave way for African slaves to worship in ways to which they were accustomed. However, many of the white slave owners and Baptist clergy continued to preach a message of obedience and submission, utilizing the Bible to support their positions at white-controlled Churches. This apprehension on the part of slaveholders was due to the fear of religious rebellion on the part of the slaves. Many of the slaves started worshiping clandestinely in hidden sites on the plantation, so they developed codes through songs to convene such gatherings. Peter Randolph, a nineteenth-century slave in Virginia, describes such a scene:

> Not allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assembled in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They had an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. . . They first asked each

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[33] Meeks, *Cracking the Stained-Glass Ceiling*, 12.

[34] Courtney Lyons, "Breaking through the Extra-Thick Stained-Glass Ceiling: African American Baptist Women in Ministry," *Review and Expositor* 110, no. 1 (February 2013): 77, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270518387_Breaking_through_the_Extra-Thick_Stained-Glass_Ceiling_African_American_Baptist_Women_in_Ministry.

> other how they felt, the state of their minds, etc. The male members then selected a certain space in separate groups, for their division of the meeting. . . Then praying and singing all around, until they generally feel quite happy. . . The slave forgets all his sufferings except to remind others of the trials during the past week.[35]

Slave masters were fearful of uprising and diminishing productivity, and they lacked knowledge regarding African customs that were demonstrated during these gatherings. Thus, slave owners outlawed such gatherings and would punish those slaves who disobeyed their orders. Many of the enslaved Africans who were brought to America continued in their traditional religious customs; however, individuals born into slavery would normally practice the white tradition of Christianity. Slaves became dissatisfied with the plantation preachers who preached a message of oppression and passivism controlled by the slaveholder. "Many of the slaveholders feared that Christianity would make their slaves unruly, so they fought against slaves being Baptized. Missionaries appealed to the profit motive by pointing out that converted slaves do better for their Master's profit than formerly, for they are taught to serve out of Christian Love and Duty."[36]

It was during the Second Great Awakening of 1800 that Protestant Evangelicalism began, emphasizing individual freedom. During that time white clergy allowed for slave preachers; however, these slave preachers would preach obedience to the master while whites were present

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[35]Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 217.

[36] Kimberly Sambol-Tosco, "Historical Overview: Religion," Slavery and the Making of America, Thirteen/WNET NY, Educational Broadcasting Corporation. accessed January 12, 2022, 2004, https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history.html.

and lift up other themes when whites were no longer around. Slave Churches started to flourish throughout the North even into the nineteenth century. Baptist and Methodist ministers where ordained, but discriminatory practices continued. "While the American Civil War brought slavery to the forefront of attention, the war was fought not to free slaves, but for 'states rights' — the southern states did not want the federal government dictating what they must do. Those living in the South believed that each state was sovereign and should have jurisdiction over its most important affairs."[37]

During this era, revival services and camp meetings were moving throughout the South and many blacks began to embrace the Baptist faith. The white preacher would teach in opposition to slavery and oppression. "They taught equality for all believers for those who supported the faith. For poor whites and slaves, this Baptist message promised full humanity and democracy despite the restrictions of the unchurched world."[38]

In 1865, the Baptist Association appointed a white man Dr. Robert Ryland as the first pastor of the new First African Baptist Church of Richmond because the "1838 Virginia Legislature denied permission for any independent Black Church."[39] The First African Baptist

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[37] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 204.

[38] Ann H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History (*Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 67.

[39] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginning: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 49.

Church at that time would not license any black preacher, and they called the ministers exhorters, considering them incapable of serving as pastors. Unfortunately, many of the slaves could not read or write, but a group in Savannah, Georgia purchased the Reverend Henry Francis, who had been given his freedom to teach the slaves to read.

During the Antebellum period and after the Civil War, many Black Churches offered freed men and women shelter, focusing on spirituality, and financial concerns regarding the black community. Following emancipation, the Black Church continued to grow vigorously and became the community gathering place to disseminate information. After being freed, Blacks rejected the white cultural practices and withdrew from attending white churches in larger numbers. The only denomination during that period that would license black preachers were Methodists. "African Methodist churches arose in Baltimore, Charleston, and New Orleans. Baltimore was one of the centers of the separatist movement among black Methodists which led to the creation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia under Richard Allen in 1816."[40]

Bishop Richard Allen was born February 14, 1760, and elected America's first black Methodist Bishop 1816. At the age of seventeen he studied scripture and led Bible studies on his master's plantation. Overtime, Allen became the religious authority for the Methodist denomination. "Allen's biblical knowledge, zeal and commanding style of preaching eventually bought his freedom and led to a career as an itinerant preacher. Because Allen was a great

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[40] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 204.

exhorter, the leading Methodist itinerant Francis Asbury asked Allen to travel abroad with him into the Deep South to convert souls."[41] Allen declined Asbury's request to travel in places where slavery was the practice of the state or county. He remained in the north and continued to teach and lead a large body of black congregants at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "After complaints from many of the white congregations, church officials announced a policy of segregated seating. The following Sunday, Richard Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones entered the church and sat in the upstairs gallery, the newly designated space for black members. Unfortunately, seating was bad in the area they sat in. The trustees insisted Allen and Jones move again to a smaller upstairs corner location."[42] Harvey narrates the unfolding of the rest of the event: "It should be noted that Allen and Jones were praying when this occurred. Allen notes, 'I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees . . . having hold of Reverend Jones, pulling him up off his knees… saying, you must get up, you must not kneel here.' Allen and Jones and other members reacted immediately. They all left the church, thus launching the Independent Negro Church Movement."[43]

Supported by the Freedmen's Bureau, freedmen and women pulled together to build independent Black Churches as a symbol of African-American need for self-determination. "The Freedmen's Bureau was established by Congress in 1865, to assist former slaves after the

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[41] Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 42.

[42] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 204.

[43] Harvey, *Through the Storm*, 42.

Civil War. The Freedmen's Bureau provided food, housing, and medical aid, established schools, and offered legal assistance. It also attempted to settle former slaves on land confiscated or abandoned during the war. However, the bureau was prevented from fully carrying out its programs due to a shortage of funds and personnel, along with the politics of race and Reconstruction."[44]

The pattern of inequality for women in the Black Baptist Church can be traced back to the establishment of the Baptist Church as an institution in the eighteenth century, separated from white Baptist Churches. Women comprised most of the congregation, yet men dominated the pulpits, church power, and politics. Women were relegated to subordinate and supportive roles on the Mother Boards, usher boards, and hospitality committees. This structure was based on the patriarchal system which dominated the conditions of Black people during slavery and was copied by the minsters who established Black Churches for former slaves. Black male ministers refused to acknowledge the views of women even as the women managed all the support functions which sustained the church. The Bible was even used to uphold the traditions of male dominance and female subordination: for example, women were constantly reminded of the New Testament scriptures that implored women's silence (i.e., 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12) as evidence that women were not called by God to be preachers.[45]

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[44] History.com Editors, "Freedmen's Bureau," History.com. October 3, 2018, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/freedmens-bureau.

[45] 1 Cor 14:34 (NIV).

Paul Harvey shares in *Through the Storm, Through the Night* that "male leadership respected the women's spiritual power and call to exhort, but they refused to recognize their call to ministry."[46] Rev. Jarena Lee is one of the first female trailblazers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church during the Second Great Awakening. Despite Bishop Allen's approval, Lee was received with opposition. Even though the male leadership believed that a woman preaching was uncommon, it was against biblical law. Overtime, Rev. Lee was granted permission to hold prayer meetings in her home and preach on the itinerary circuit. The itinerary circuit was composed of evangelists who traveled throughout the communities holding small revival meetings. Rev. Lee confronted and challenged the center of power within the African Methodist Episcopal Church thus laying a proto-black feminist foundation for equality for women.[47] Julia Foote, Amanda Smith, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Jarena Lee were all trailblazers who fought against oppression and inequality within the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Role of the Women in the Church

Black women have contributed so much to the church and society**.** They filled the pews, Sunday after Sunday, as Sunday school teachers, ushers, hostesses, evangelists, women's day speakers, choir members, and so much more. They were trailblazers in the fight against slavery, followed by a century of Jim Crow racism, oppression, injustices, segregation, and sexism.

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[46] Harvey, *Through the Storm*, 43.

[47] Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Pantianos Classics, 1836), 17-19.

Evelyn Higginbotham noted that "they expressed their discontent with both racial and gender discrimination and demanded equal rights for blacks and women."[48] Women's roles within the church were not determined by the willingness of men to share leadership positions but by their own desire to nurture and cultivate the body of Christ by creating a space that expresses their voices.

Spirituality has always been important for African-American women and the community. Additionally, it provided hope for the downtrodden, encouragement for the depressed, strength and celebration in the midst of much pain and degradation. According to Lillian Comas-Díaz and Thema Bryant-Davis identify in their article how spirituality is a critical component regarding physical and mental wellness for African-American woman.[49] As Comas-Díaz states, "spirituality mobilizes women to take control of their lives, overcome their oppressed mentality, and achieve a critical knowledge of themselves."[50] Spirituality and religion are a critical source of strength in discovering purpose and meaning in life. Womanist theology embraces the concept of spirituality to release the chains of oppression and celebrate African-American women's contribution in the Church, community, and to society.

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[48] Evelyn B. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 11.

[49] Thema Bryant-Davis and Lillian Comas-Díaz, "Introduction: Womanist and Mujerista Psychologies," in *Womanist and Mujerista Psychologies: Voices of Fire, Acts of Courage,* ed. Thema Bryant-Davis and Lillian Comas-Diaz (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016), 8-9.

[50] Lillian Comas-Diaz, "Mujerista Psychospirituality," in *Womanist and Mujerista Psycholigies,* eds. Bryant-Davis and Comas-Diaz, 149-70.

Black women have contributed a great deal of their time and energy in establishing the Black civil society. "During abolitionists period, sororities, Black women's groups, churches, and the civil rights movements challenged White supremacy and created institutions that fought for political, social, and economic justice for African Americans."[51] Boyd notes that black women struggled for group survival against racial discrimination, battling oppression while simultaneously fighting for reconstruction to eliminate segregationist policies and procedures. Black women fought for the survival of the black family; as Marsha Foster Boyd states, they "engaged in bridge building so that one who comes behind us won't have to go through what we have faced."[52]

In Walker-Barnes's book, *Too Heavy a Yoke,* she examines the matter of a strong black woman who is made to endure ridicule, oppression, and sexism from domineering and patriotic men within the church and in society. This image of a strong black woman has been perpetuated by her foremothers and idolized by society. Regardless of how black women have been viewed, they have historically been identified as strong and they possess the ability to persevere through suffering by maintaining a strong disposition. Black women have been taught to push through, to keep going, to provide, and to endure difficult times without protest. Asking for help was a sign of weakness and could be misconstrued as being vulnerable, something they could not afford. As Walker-Barnes states, "the myth of Black women's strength is dangerously seductive

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[51] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 197.

[52] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 201.

in that it imbues Black women with a certain moral and emotional superiority."[53] Her writings acknowledged that there is more work to be done to tear down the negative connotation of being labeled as superhuman, as well as to fight repression and suppression against the black woman, especially within the Black Church.

Male Black Baptist preachers certainly recognized the contributions of women's active support for the denominations, "yet male-biased traditions and rules of decorum sought to mute women's voices and accentuate their subordinate status."[54] The traditional Black Church was a culture created to combat a system that was created to crush the spirit of men and women. The Black Church offered an opportunity for African Americans to come together and create community and to nourish upcoming leaders. For several decades there have been a significant number of women in the Black Churches obtaining licenses and ordination; however, it still remains problematic for women who are following their call to serve as senior pastors. If the Black Church is moving towards openness, hospitality, and full inclusion for all of God's children, then there must be a conscious, concerted, and relentless effort to dismantle the traditional structure and practices in order to give opportunities to women as senior pastors.

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[53] Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy,* 20.

[54] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham*, "*The Black Church: A Gender Perspective*,"* in *African-American Religion Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert Raboteau (NY: Routhledge, 1997), 205.

Women's Era in Black History

The late nineteenth century is referred to as the women's era in Black history. Women had come into a gender consciousness, according to Evelyn Higginbotham's *Righteous Discontent*. "During this period, young activists within the Black Baptist Church became frustrated over women being hindered from speaking their voice and seeking leadership positions within the church."[55] Henry Louis Gates tells the story of Nannie Helen Burroughs who was a young black woman involved with National Association of Colored Women established in 1896. The organization promoted equality for African American women. "Guided by her faith, Burroughs's vision for social justice encompassed women's equality. She argued for an expanded role for women in the church in her rousing speech at the 1900 National Baptist Convention."[56] Burroughs was a trailblazer who co-founded the Black Baptist Women's Convention in 1901 wherein women demanded the right to vote, equal treatment, public transportation, and equal schools. This convention was formed as an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention to give women a voice.

During this period, just as before and presently, there have been many black women who have felt the call to positions of ministry within the local Black Baptist Churches. Chanta M. Haywood stated in her book, *The Prophesying Daughters* that "until black men in the church deal with the patriarchal views they have adopted, women's voices will continue to remain

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[55] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 28.

[56] Henry Louis Gates, *The Black Church*: *This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2021), 36.

silenced and unbalanced."[57] Women who have experienced being called by God have used every imaginable argument to support what they believe in their heart. The Bible has given images of extraordinary women such as Deborah, who was a respected judge in Israel who enabled the Israelites to experience peace for 40 years (Judges 4). Other women include Rahab; who had a spotted past and who many had cast her aside (Joshua 2). There was also Hannah, who is lifted up for her confidence in God to respond to her condition and the faith she demonstrated in the dedication of her son to God's service (1 Sam.1). There is Mary Magdalene who is the first to see the resurrected Jesus (John 20:1) and Phoebe, a female Deacon of the church at Cenchreae whom Paul salutes in one of his letters (Romans 16:1). Even Jesus recognized the significance of women in the early Church surrounding His death and resurrection. These are all examples of powerful women who served in leadership positions within the Body of Christ. God is not limited by a person's sex or gender when it comes to using people in the Body of Christ. If God is not hindered by utilizing women, why is it that so many Black clergy have difficulty in recognizing the equality of everyone in the Body of Christ being used in ministry within the Church?

National Baptist Convention

The National Baptist Convention was organized in 1865, in order to centralize traditional black Baptists' power and influence. The NBCI includes approximately 7.5 million African American Baptists. The African American Baptist Church was birthed out of struggle and

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[57] Chanta M. Haywood, *The Prophesying Daughters* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2003), 73.

segregation; therefore, it has recognized God as what James Cone calls the "God of the Oppressed." It must be noted that Baptists are identified as autonomous, which means they are self-governed. The NBCI does not have a presiding Bishop overseeing black Baptists Churches. Nevertheless, the local Church usually follows the principles and standards set by the organization. Historically, the NBCI has not supported women called into ministry or to be considered a pastor. Many Baptist Churches will use New Testament Epistles to argue against the thought that God calls women to preach. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul says "women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says." If we read this literally, it means that women cannot speak or preach inside the Church. However, Acts 2:17 (NIV) says "It shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all humanity; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Who is going to prophesy? Sons *and* daughters. Because of oppressive, sexist, and male dominant norms and methods of biblical interpretation, black women have been devalued, subject to exclusion, condescension, discrimination, and the threat of being disciplined for their disobedience to pastoral and ecclesial authority and also to the will of God.

Women such as Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth were early forerunners in black women's religious circles. "In the early 1800's Stewart, an abolitionist, was the first known African American woman to speak before a mixed audience of men and women."[58] Stewart

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[58] Maggie MacLean, "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston- September 21, 1833," Iowa State University Achives of Women's Political Communication, accessed January 12, 2022, https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2020/11/20/mrs-stewarts-farewell-address-to-her-friends-in-the-city-of-boston-sept-21-1833/.

allowed the words from the Bible to justify her right to speak. She discussed examples of great women in the Bible, like Priscilla and Esther to emphasize her point of women having rights. "Sojourner Truth was a woman following God who changed her name from Isabella Baumfree. She went throughout the south preaching the truth concerning slavery. Because of her illiteracy, her text emphasized "when I met God" which focused on personal experience with God."[59] These are examples of strong black women who fought against oppression and utilized biblical women who reflected their personal experiences as a foundation.

However, most women in the Black Baptist Church were denied formal leadership positions, especially ordained ministry. In order for women to participate in their Churches, they often had to form women-only groups which included both White and African American women. In her book, *Not Without a Struggle*, Vashti McKenzie, the first female bishop in the A.M.E. Church, chronicled some of the ways women were in ministry. They included groups such as the "Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society (A.M.E. Church), Colored Female Religious and Moral Society, Female Mite Society, the Female Religious Biography and Societies, and the Women's Union Missionary Society of America which was an interdenominational group."[60]

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[59] "Sojourner Truth," African American Odyssey: A Quest For Full Citizenship, Library of Congress Exhibit, December 9, 1998, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/educate/truth.html.

[60] Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996), 25.

Charmaine Webster writes, “In the year 1900, Nannie Helen Burroughs gave a speech entitled “How the sisters are hindered from helping” to the National Baptist Convention. She knew that they needed an autonomous organization to protect the work of Black Baptist women.”[61] Nannie fought for the rights of women to be recognized as lay and clergy. She stated at the convention, “If we believe that women are called to ministry, then we ought not attend nor support Churches that do not believe in women pastors.”[62]

[61] Charmaine Webster, “Unduly Unsupported: Black Clergywomen and the Baptist Church,” The Christian Citizen, December 13, 2019, https://christiancitizen.us/unduly-unsupported-black-clergywomen-and-the-baptist-church/.

[62] Webster, “Unduly Unsupported.”

Chapter Two

Biblical Background

In this chapter, I will examine the teaching of the Apostle Paul in reference to biblical and theological texts which some traditional Black Baptist Churches have used to exclude women from positions of ministry within the Church. In addition, I will examine the social, cultural, geographic, and ecclesiastical concerns that Paul had to consider as he wrote.

It is my overall understanding that the value of biblical interpretation and the study of Scripture is that we encounter evidence that calls us to rethink our previous interpretations and even some of our current practices and treasured traditions. In rethinking these traditions, we must clarify our understanding of the role of women in the Bible since this will allow us to open ourselves to allowing women to more fully participate in all ministries within the Church. According to Catherine and Richard Kroeger in their book *I Suffer Not a Woman* "the Bible is not a book of oppression—for women or anyone else. It has repeatedly proven to be an instrument of liberation for God's people…. It offers hope for the poor, comfort for the afflicted, identity for the disenfranchised, and justice for the dispossessed."[63]

Growing up from 60's through the 80's in a conservative black Baptist Church wherein 87% of the members were women, the leadership was male-dominant, and women excluded from pastoral positions and ordination was the norm for me. I never questioned this traditional

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[63] Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 29.

practice of excluding women from ministry positions, and I was led to believe that the Bible supported this practice. I witnessed women in the church proclaiming God's Word not from the pulpit but from the side behind a small podium and this only during Women's Day programs. This same practice of excluding women from leadership was seen in other Baptist Churches with which we fellowshipped. In 2000, I heard the first woman ordained minister in the African Methodist tradition preach the Word and I could not deny the presence of the Holy Spirit in her message. When I shared this information with other clergy, every imaginable argument was used to deny what God had spoken by calling women into ministry. It was then that I began researching Scripture and found there were several women in the Bible who held leadership positions, such as all of the examples I provided in the previous chapter. We consistently see throughout scripture that God draws women out of the brokenness of patriarchy and oppression, into leadership positions in His plans of redemption. As I entered college, I was introduced to feminism and womanist theology which enhanced my knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding women's issues.

Jesus Christ also recognized and included women in his earthly ministry, and they were present for his teaching, at his death, and to be witnesses to his resurrection. Jesus interacted with women throughout the Bible in ways that opposed the patriarchal practices around Him. He is welcoming of the sinful woman who anoints Him with perfume in (Luke 7:36-50). He engages a Samaritan woman at a well in a theological conversation about living water: "The disciples were astonished to find him talking with this woman" (John 4:27). She next preaches (proclaimed the good news) about Jesus in town, inspiring many to pursue a life of discipleship by taking up their crosses and following Him. Jesus initiated a new respect for women and

moved progressively towards tearing down barriers which threatened the free flow of the Gospel. Jesus continued His ministry by commissioning Mary Magdalene as the first person to preach the "Good News" of the resurrection to the other disciples in (John 20:11-18). These are all examples of women who were in leadership positions, thus person is not limited by economic status, gender, race, culture, or geography. He invites everyone to full membership in the Body of Christ.

Given that there is both biblical and contemporary evidence that God calls and equips women for ministry, why is it that traditional Black Baptist Churches have difficulty in recognizing the significance of everyone in the Body of Christ being called to ministry within the Church? I came to realize that my narrow-minded and sexist position towards women in ministry had been ingrained in me through Baptist traditions and very particular interpretation of Scripture. It is obvious to me that many Black Baptist Churches have taken this same position by allowing traditional, denominational practices to influence their misinterpretation of Scripture.

Historical Trailblazers

Historically, there have been foremothers preaching, seeking ordination, and planting Churches who represent extraordinary examples of courage and perseverance under scrutiny and ridicule from dominant male pastors. In her book *Not Without a Struggle,* Vashti McKenzie calls the roll: "These women included Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Johnson, Amanda Berry Smith,

Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote just to name a few."[64] So many women who cross the threshold of the traditional Black Baptist Church have been denied the opportunity to exercise their spiritual gift as ordained ministers. In her book *Not Without a Struggle,* Vashti McKenzie states that "there are several perspectives that shape a theological structure for the support or rejection of female leadership in the church. The traditional male-articulated arguments that stem from Barth's minimizing human experience and elevating the Word of God alone. The Universal theological and feminist theologians contend that the experience out of which Christian theology is formed is not a universal experience but the experience of the dominant culture."[65]

Throughout the biblical texts there are admonishments for the inclusion of women in ministry in the Body of Christ. One example is the oneness and unity of women and men in God's creation. In the book of Genesis, Adam (which means humanity) is created in God's very own image (Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–2). Since male and female were created in God's image, this does not imply or suggest male headship or female submission. The formation of humanity is not of itself, nor of parents but of God, and it has been perfectly sculpted to represent God's beauty and perfection. As suggested by Psalm 139:14. "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* Man and woman were thus created as representatives of the excellence of God's handiwork.

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[64] McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle*, 30.

[65] McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle*, 41.

God did not create either men or women to be inferior to each other; instead, each reflects God's glory.

Similarly, humankind being given dominion (or stewardship) over the earth should not be interpreted to mean that a man has "dominion" over or is a steward of a woman. Many have interpreted Genesis 2:23, wherein the woman is called "bones of my bones and flesh of my flesh," as an indication of the authority men have over women. However, that type of identification happens until after the fall when "Adam named his wife Eve" (Genesis 3:20). Additionally, Genesis 2 discusses woman as partner or helper with man where the word "helper" is not to be accepted as an explanation of submission and service to man; rather, the woman acting as helper is a collective service with man to God.

Equality in the Writings of Paul

Paul supported women in leadership, as was evident in a number of churches, including Philippi, Thessalonica, Caesarea, and Rome. What is perplexing is that, in spite of biblical texts that can call forth equality, Protestant Church leaders and theologians will adamantly quote 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (NIV):

> Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.

So many other portions of scripture support equality. In fact, Paul preached on the importance of equality in the Body of Christ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,

there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NKJV). This verse reinforces that all Christians, regardless of their race or status, are children of God without exceptions. For centuries, Galatians 3:28 and Acts 2 were foundational Scriptures for women in ministry. Opposers of women in ministry have stated that Galatians 3:28, refers to the spiritual reality that we all have access to God through our faith in Christ Jesus; however, it is obvious that the text is discussing equality for all.

Paul's affirmation of the life of the Church is not based on being male or female, nor dismissing God's creative distinctiveness between male and female gender. The reality is that gender does not determine one's involvement in Christ's Church. Paul often spoke on equality, and his teaching was inclusive of women who supported his gospel message. Paul did not support the inferiority of women nor was he an advocate for treating women as second-class members of the Church. Paul did not teach hierarchy to husbands controlling their wives. It is essential to take into full account that when Paul wrote on the issue of women in the Church, he wrote against the backdrop of the Jewish and Greek cultural practices. Paul discussed biblical equality, which is "the belief that all people are equal before God and in Christ. All have equal responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to the glory of God. God freely calls believers to roles and ministries without regard to class, gender, or race."[66]

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[66] Alan G. Padgett, "What is Biblical Equality," *Priscilla Papers Academic Journal* 16, no. 3 (July 31, 2002), www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/what-biblical-equality.

In his book *What Paul Really Said About Women,* John Bristow stated: "They understood Paul from the viewpoint of their own culture and customs. "In a sense, they read Paul's words through the eyes of Aristotle and in so doing, they established a traditional method of viewing Paul's insights from a perspective that was Greek rather than Jewish and pagan rather than Christian."[67] Indeed, many biblical scholars have different interpretations of the exhortations in Ephesians 5:23 (NKJV): "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." In Greek, the teaching, and practices of the time of which Paul is speaking is the word *arche* which means point of origin, ruler or head. "Ancient Greek society was fundamentally patriarchal in nature and women were always under the control of men. Women were never to be in charge of their own lives and were viewed essentially as evil creatures."[68]

After his conversion experience Paul was determined to ensure equality for both men and women was demonstrated in his teaching. He knew that he was fighting against the patriarchal and sexist structure that existed throughout Greece and Rome. Paul did not use the word *arche* in teaching of Ephesians 5:23. Instead he used the word "*kephale,* a military term that means "one who leads" but not in the sense of a director."[69] Most people have interpreted this passage

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[67] John T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 3.

[68] IvyPanda, "Aristotle's Views on Women: Descriptive Essay," September, 2, 2021, https://ivypanda.com/essays/aristotles-views-on-women/.

[69] Anthony J. P. Kenny and Anselm H. Amadio, "Aristotle: Greek philosopher," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* March 2, 2021, www.britannica.com/biography/Aristotle.

as meaning that the husband is to rule over his wife. This was the teaching of Aristotelians to the Hellenized people. "Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the greatest intellectual figures of Western history."[70] However, he saw women as subjects to men such that men should exert political rule over the wife. In fact, Aristotle was known for teaching that women were defective men.

Women participate in Jesus' ministry and actually support it with their resources (Luke 8:1-3). Women are recalled as some of the first witnesses to the resurrection (Luke 24:22; John 20:1, 11-18). Next, the apostles engaged in prayer: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" Acts 1:14. After the Day of Pentecost, men and women were welcomed into the fellowship and both men and women were baptized Acts 8:12. During Jesus' ministry, He frequently ministered to women who were rejected and ostracized by their communities. In spite of the laws regarding uncleanness, "Jesus allowed a woman with a menstrual problem to touch him (Mark 5:25-34); He permitted a sinful woman to kiss His feet (Luke 7:36-50). Throughout Jesus's ministry, He was determined to demonstrate equality and justice for women by breaking many of the social norms regarding male and female interactions. He engaged in theological discourse with a Samaritan woman (John 4). He spoke to women in public, paying attention to their plights. He healed the daughter of a Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). What we see from biblical

[70] Kenny and Amadio, "Aristotle."

examples is that women have been involved in various ministries throughout history of the church.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter told the crowd what he had witnessed at the tomb which was a fulfillment of prophecy about the new age. He quoted Joel 2:28-30 which states that God will say in the last days, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they willprophesy."[71] Peter is saying here that both young and old, male and female, have the spirit of God poured on them to speak the Word of God. According to 1 Corinthians 12:28, prophecy is one of the five-fold ministry gifts that God has appointed to the Body of Christ. Paul indicates that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Certainly, God called women to also possess the gift of prophecy (minister). Some scholars would say that prophecy ceased, based on 1 Corinthians 13:8, and the completion of the New Testament canon. This belief is incorrect in that this passage refers to the future, and that which is fulfilled when we see Christ face-to-face.

Dr. Claude Mariottini, in his article entitled The Seven Prophetesses of the Old Testament, discusses women prophets. His article demonstrates that God calls and supports

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[71] Prophesy here means to speak for God or to foretell the future, and both the Old and New Testaments use the words prophetess and prophet. The word "prophetess" refers to a woman in prophetic ministry.

equality for both men and women to serve prophetic ministry. He states in the article that "the first woman prophet in the Old Testament was Miriam, Aaron's sister, who took a tambourine in her hand to sing praises unto the Lord. Next was Deborah Judges 4:4-5, whose ministry came at a time when the people of Israel were being oppressed by Jabin, king of the Canaan."[72] In addition, Isaiah's wife was called a prophetess. Many scholars believe she was called a prophetess because she was married to a prophet; however, nowhere in Scripture do you see this reference to prophetess. The next Old Testament woman to be called prophetess was Huldah (2 King 22:14). She was a woman of influential ministry during the time of the religious life of Judah.[73] Dr Mariottini's article shows the significance of women in ministry, and it nullifies the traditional perspective from clergy who have utilized certain scriptures to denounce women who have been called to ministry.

Paul's Words to Timothy

In this next section I will review Paul's words to Timothy: "I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man: she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:12, NKJV). To what is this passage referring? Some have interpreted this scripture to say women cannot teach men. If that was the case, we must apply it to every area of life: women should not teach boys in school or in Sunday school classes. Paul's statement to Timothy was based on historical and cultural

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[72] Claude Mariottini, "The Seven Prophetesses of the Old Testment," Dr. Claude Mariottini, December 16, 2013, https://claudemariottini.com/2013/12/16/the-seven-prophetesses-of-the-old-testament/.

[73] Mariottini, "The Seven Prophetesses."

rituals of the time. The assumption that God does not want women to teach is erroneous. Many passages in scripture are not just about what Paul did, but why he did it and how we can apply his principles to our life.

Even though Paul continued to teach on equality regarding women, Rabbis and Priests excluded women from Temple worship in the New Testament because they were forbidden to read. In addition, Priests were forbidden to talk to a woman in public. According to Zhava Glaser in her article titled *The Role of Women in the Bible*, "Rabbis did not consider it incumbent upon women to learn to read in order to study the Scriptures. Based on the passage in Deuteronomy 4:9 (KJV), "teach them to thy sons," the rabbis declared women to be exempt from the commandment to learn the Law of Moses."[74] The same attitude toward women was perpetuated by Jewish men. Thus, this attitude became a customary way of life. It demonstrates the type of attitude toward women that was dominant during Paul's time and before. Even though this practice became the norm over 2000 years ago, it continues to foster the oppressive and sexist attitude of traditional Black Baptist Churches in the twenty-first century.

Jesus did not see women as they were seen by Rabbis and priests. He was revolutionary in this regard by tearing down the traditional ways in which Scripture had been interpreted regarding women. One example of Jesus's progressive attitude toward women was seen in His treatment of the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50: "One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to come and

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[74] Zhava Glaser, "The Role of Women in the Bible," Jews for Jesus, July 20, 2020, https://jewsforjesus.org/learn/the-role-of-women-in-the-bible.

eat with them, but among them was a woman who was identified as a sinner who brought an alabaster flask of oil and began to wash Jesus's feet with her tears. The men of the house were outraged and began judging the woman's acts of worship. Jesus moved swiftly to her defense. Jesus behavior shattered the prejudicial customs of his day."[75] Another example of Jesus's progressive attitude toward women could be seen in his attitude to two sisters. Martha welcomed Him and His followers into her home and continued to be engaged in many tasks to extend hospitality to her guests. Her sister Mary chose to sit as one of His disciples at the feet of Jesus and listen to His teaching. In a patriarchal society, the pressure was on Mary to attend only to certain activities. However, Jesus supported Mary in her choice to learn from Him as one of His disciples (Luke 10:38-42). As Charles E. Carlston points out, "Jesus was perfectly comfortable in the presence of women because, for Him equality between the sexes was not so much a distant legislative goal as rather self-evident fact."[76] He had many women followers and frequently ministered to them. For example, He healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31); He removed a demon from the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30); He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead (Mark 9:18-1); He healed the woman with an issue of blood (Mark 9:20-22); He raised a widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17); He taught Mary and Martha in their home (Luke 10:38-42); and, He healed a crippled woman in the synagogue (Luke 13:10-17).

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[75] Brent Kerchevile, "Luke 7:36-50 The Fragrance of Gratefulness," West Palm Beach Church of Christ, January 30, 2011, https://westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com/new-testament/luke/luke_7_36-50.html.

[76] Charles E. Carlston, "Proverbs, Maxims, and the Historical Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 96-97, www.jstor.org/stable/3265702.

Nevertheless, the key issue in this discussion regarding Jesus's perspective on equality for women is a hermeneutical one. Marianne M. Thompson stated that "any time we turn to Scripture and ask what it says to the church today, we put our hermeneutical theory into practice, consciously or unconsciously."[77] Additionally, hermeneutics is not done in a vacuum, apart from exegesis. Theodore George points out that "hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, and wisdom literature."[78] It involves looking at what the text meant when it was originally written in order to interpret what it means for the present. The notion of biblical hermeneutics applies as we read the different interpretations of Scripture that have excluded women from positions of ministry within the church. Paul writes that "we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (Romans 12:6). No mention is made of gender, social class, cultural background, ethnicity, race, age, or country of origin. It is imperative in the twenty-first century that we tear down our cultural practices or traditional beliefs to recognize that there is no New Testament teaching that supports the notion that gifts for ministry are based on gender.

This different interpretation is seen in 1 Corinthians 11:3: "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is

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[77] Marianne Meye Thompson, Response to "Authority, Hierarchy, and Leadership Patterns in the Bible," by Richard N. Longnecker, in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 91.

[78] Theodore George, "Hermeneutics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta (December 9, 2020): https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/hermeneutics/.

God." We have a better understanding when we read that in creation Adam was the source of his wife, Eve; in much the same way that God is the source of Christ. We also see it in Ephesians 5:23 (NKJV): "For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church." As we explore these passages, we see that Paul is not teaching here about marriage. The instructions here are about customs and the disorderly behavior of the Corinthian Church. The discussion centers on women's and men's head coverings. It becomes clear that there is no reference to marital submission when read in light of 1 Corinthians 8:12, wherein Paul is discussing the order of man and woman with regard to creation: Paul was using "head" in verse 3 with the Greek meaning of source, origin, base, or derivation. "Man was the source of the beginning of women in the sense that woman was made from the side of Adam."[79] So, Paul was not using the Greek word *kephale* to suggest a chain of command. Particular interpretations of these Scriptures have been perpetuated as the evidence to support male dominance in our treatment of women in our homes, society and especially in our churches.

Paul set the hermeneutical structure regarding equality for women which has led to considerable achievements by female leaders in the growth and development of the church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In her book, *Listening for God*, Renita Weems states that "there have been women, both in the pew and the pulpit, who have sat in silence for many years but eventually stood up and exercised their prophetic and pastoral gifts."[80] Many women have

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[79] Thompson, Response, 91.

[80] Renita J. Weems, *Listening for God* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 25.

stood up without denominational support, without ordination or ministerial titles, in order to pave the way for women in the twenty-first century. These women have started denominations, planted churches, organized conferences, have been appointed as bishops, pastors, theologians, and have been heads of women-only organizations. It is remarkable and commendable that women heard the call to proclaim the good news of Christ through the "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals of cultural biases, traditions, and sexism."[81]

The road was rough and the going got tougher. Still, women were determined to stay the course regardless of harsh criticism or biblical thrashing. Every imaginable argument was used to deny what God had put into their hearts. Women of today have stood on the shoulders of strong women of yesterday such as Margaret Fell who established the "Mother of Society of Friends" and instituted the Quaker's women's meeting which gave women the opportunity to preach publicly outside of their denomination. Another woman from the past who paved the way was Sarah Osborne. She conducted revivals from 1760 to 1796 near her home in Newport, Rhode Island. In addition to their contribution Julia Foote became the first ordained deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. For women to participate fully in the religious community of their Church, "they often had to form women only groups, for both White and African American women. They included groups such as the Women's Home and Foreign

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[81] McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle*, 22.

Missionary Society African Methodist Episcopal Church and Colored Female Religious and Moral society, just to name a few.'[82]

Things have changed in the twenty-first century and some denominations have become more accepting of women clergy, such as American Baptist, Full Gospel Baptist Church, and some Southern Baptist Churches. Despite these changes, unofficial traditions concerning male-only leadership remain in place. Many traditional Black Baptist Churches still hold the opinion that only men can serve as pastors, presiding elders, ruling elders, district superintendents, denominational heads, or a bishop. Nevertheless, women have continued to accept the call to ministry in increasing numbers. It was by their fruits (cf. Matthew 7:20) that we have extraordinary clergy women such as: Dr. Claudette Copeland, Pastor of New Creation Christian Fellowship in San Antonio, Texas; Dr. Renita Weems, the first woman to earn a doctorate in Old Testament studies; Bishop Vashi McKenzie, the first woman elected as Bishop of the African Methodist Church; Bishop Jackie McCollough, the founder and Pastor of The International Gathering at Beth Rapha; the Honorable Reverend Suzan Johnson Cook, a U.S. presidential advisor, pastor, and theologian; Rev. Prathia Laura Ann Hall**,** Pastor of Mt. Sharon Baptist Church in Philadelphia; Dr. Bernice King, CEO of The King Center; and the Rev. Pauli Murray, first African American woman ordained as an Episcopal priest. I would be remiss if I did not mention upcoming millennials. One of them is Dr. Neichelle Guidry, who currently serves as the Dean of Chapel and Director of WISDOM Center at Spelman College in Atlanta,

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[82] McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle*, 25.

Georgia. She is a powerful enthusiastic young woman with a message of hope and encouragement for young women of today. "She is also the creator of shepreaches, a virtual community and professional development organization that aspires to uplift African-American millennial women in ministry through theological reflection, fellowship, and liturgical curation."[83] Another is Rev. Dr. Brianna K. Parker, a "highly sought-after preacher, public speaker, millennial engagement coach and ministry consultant. She is the curator and founder of the Black Millennial Café (BMC), a consulting practice and data resource center for persons seeking healthy engagement with Black millennials of faith."[84]

As James Henry Harris stated, "the Black Baptist church must move towards equality and a theology of liberation for women. The Black Church needs a practical theology that can help liberate it from social, political, sexist, and economic oppression and that Jesus is the liberator."[85] The way we can accomplish this task is to first recognize how women have also been called to ministry and deserve the same respect as men. This means women should be given the same ministry opportunities as men to be ordained and to advance to positions as pastors and bishop. We must comprehend that Jesus was sent to earth by God to end the agonizing consequences of

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[83] "Rev. Dr. Neichelle R. Guidry," Howard University, accessed January 12, 2022, https://chapel.howard.edu/speaker-schedule/speaker-profiles/rev-dr-neichelle-r-guidry.

[84] Brianna K. Parker, "My Story," Rev Bri, accessed January 12, 2022, https://www.revbri.com/my-story.

[85] James Henry Harris, "Practicing Liberation in the Black Church," *Christian Century* (June 13-20, 1990), accessed January 12, 2022, https://www.religion-online.org/article/practicing-liberation-in-the-black-church/.

sin, including the obstacle that exists between men and women. Jesus's mission was not gender-biased; rather, it was gender inclusive.

There is a need to dismantle the oppressive, sexist opinions of Evangelical pastors and authors such as John MacArthur of Grace Community Church, who publicly slammed women teachers and pastors in an article titled "Does the Bible Permit a Woman to Preach." MacArthur states, "according to 1 Corinthians 14:33, it is improper for a woman to speak, and in Greek the word improper is *aischros* which means disgraceful or shameful."[86] On November 3, 2019, MacArthur, stood in front of a crowd of over 8000 members utilizing the Bible to adamantly proclaim that women who preach or are pastors are flagrantly disobedient to the Word of God. John MacArthur is an example of a male chauvinist, egotistical preacher who has utilized the Bible to his advantage to bash women. The Bible says in Galatians 3:28, (NIV) "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Until there is a shift in the mind set of conservative evangelical preachers to acknowledge equality in the Body of Christ, women in ministry will continue to be ostracized and labeled as being disobedient to God's Word.

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[86] John MacArthur, "Does the Bible Permit a Woman to Preach?" Grace to You, November 3, 2019, https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/81-56.

Chapter Three

Womanist Theology as a Source of Liberation

In this chapter, I will examine how womanist theology has liberated African American women who have been stereotyped and oppressed due to traditional practices within the Black Church, biblical misinterpretation, and patriarchal influences. African American women have constructed a narrative for themselves and for other women of color which provides a seat of cultural power—a seat that has been exclusively held by men. From the period marked by slavery in America (discussed in Chapter 1), Black preachers historically provided cultural leadership that helped to maintain the physical and emotional survival of many African Americans. In The *Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination*, Doland Hubbard discusses "the role of the Black preacher in the African American community with the responsibility of creating the face of the community."[87] It is evident that African American pastors have served the black community as central leadership figure from the time of slavery, during Jim Crow and Civil Rights, and through today; however, this role has exclusively been held by men. Despite the historical evidence that black male preachers have been strong advocates for the black community, it is tragic that African American clergywomen have been ostracized and denied opportunities for leadership positions by patriarchal leadership within the traditional Black Church.

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[87] Charles A. Tita, review of *The Sermon and The African Literary Imagination*, by Dolan Hubbard, *CLA Journal* 39, no. 2 (December 1995): 258-62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44322948.

Tiffany Thomas, in her article *The Legacy of Women in the Black Church*, states "it has been women in small local churches around the country, it is women teaching Sunday school, leading children's programs, organizing fundraisers, scrubbing down the sanctuary, ushering in visitors, singing hallelujah in the choirs, donning white gloves and skirts in holy preparation of Communion, and raising a hand of praise from the pew."[88] Throughout history it has been women like these who have taken the mantle of leadership regardless of the task to be accomplished within the church.

Growing up at Calvary Baptist Church in San Diego, California in 1965 was a great experience. The focus of this church was community, family, and black empowerment of that era. Dr. S.M. Lockridge was the pastor, an educated man who mounted the pulpit each Sunday morning proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. The Calvary community was a warm and caring place that nurtured my emotional and spiritual growth. There were some socially significant developments to this Calvary Baptist Church experience: the church was the village that prepared you for living in the world. It was this nurturing and caring environment that stressed work ethic, education, and not giving over to the oppression of white people.

As a child growing up at this historically Black Baptist Church it was pressed upon me that women who proclaimed a call to the ministry were not to be acknowledged. It was certainly taboo to welcome a female to physically sit in the pulpit, and ordination violated women's sociocultural position. It was presented as if it was clearly forbidden in Scripture. In hindsight, the silent voice of oppression dated back as far as I can remember. When I contemplate the

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[88] Thomas, "The Legacy of Women."

silent voice of oppression against women, I can see its reification in many areas. Not only was it in the pulpit but it had a far-reaching effect which permeated other areas of my life.

An example of this is TeResa Green, whose work is primarily in the area of Political Science and African studies, who laments the inequality that has plagued Black Churches. She writes: "Although Black Churches have throughout history been involved in seeking justice and equality for African Americans, the inequality of Black women within Black Churches remains an unresolved issue."[89] In the 60s, 70s, and 80s, Black women were marginalized even as the traditional Black religious denominations tended to have predominantly female congregations and mostly male pastoral leadership. I witnessed this male dominance in other denominations while growing up in San Diego, California in the Church of God in Christ; among the Methodist; and quite clearly within the Catholic Church.

While attending Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California, Dr. Nicolas Grier introduced the subject of womanist theology, which surfaced my conservative experience within the Black Baptist Church wherein I saw women excluded from such positions as ordained minister, Pastor, Bishop, or from preaching God's Word. Womanist theology challenged my traditional values and gave me the opportunity to find solidarity with women like my sisters, relatives, and others who I saw being denied the opportunity to accept their calling in the Black Baptist Church. Womanist theology broadened my intellect to support black women who have been oppressed and sat silent in the pews. As Townes indicates, "the roots of womanist theology span the 256-year period of chattel slavery in the West and the survival and support

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[89] Green, *A Gendered Spirit*, 115.

commitments of Black women during this period including the new racism of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s."[90]

Townes goes on to make it clear that womanist theology has contributed to changes in the perception and treatment of women that have been occurring in recent years. Renita Weems writes, "Womanist theology gives black women the opportunity to see themselves in the scriptures and allows the world to see the complexity and richness of black womanhood. It utilizes black women's history, culture and religious experience to interpret theology and church liturgy."[91] Furthermore, it emerged to address the ravages of racism, classism, gender bias, and economic inequality in the everyday reality of African American women. Townes defines womanist theology as "a form of reflection that places the religious and moral perspectives of black women at the center of its method. Issues of class, gender (including sex, sexism, sexuality, and sexual exploitation), and race are seen as *theological* problems. Womanist theology takes old (traditional) religious language and symbols and gives them new (more diverse and complex) meaning."[92]

The term "womanist" was coined in 1982 by Alice Walker, whose desire was to provide a framework which could be used by women of color to delineate themselves from the white feminist movement. In her text "*In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, Walker defines "womanist"

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[90] Emilie M. Townes, "Womanist Theology," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3-4 (2004): 160, http://hdl.handle.net/1803/8226.

[91] Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 59.

[92] Townes, "Womanist Theology," 159.

as follows: “Black women in America are calling into question their suppressed role in the African American church, the community, the family, and the larger society. Womanist Theology arose in the 1980s as more Black American women joined the clergy and began to question whether Black male theologians adequately and fairly addressed the unique life experiences of Black women in American society.”[93] One of the goals of Womanist Theology was to formulate strategies to elimination black oppression and confront the biased ways in which literature had presented women. In addition, the concept and practices are a motivator to assist women in recognizing the importance of “helping each other see when and how they are instruments of their own and other people’s oppression.”[94]

But womanist religious reflection is more than analytical examination. It is the affirmation of the spiritual empowerment of black women’s voices and their stories. It aims to affirm positive self-determination which is shaped by interaction between God and your spiritual embodiment. A womanist believes that cultural heritage and self-awareness develop strong leadership qualities. Walker describes her as audacious. Tuzyline Allan, in her book *Introduction: Decoding Womanist Grammar of Difference,“*defines audacious behavior as a rich, self-affirming psychological resource that facilitates survival advantage in the social pecking order” necessary to overcome “arrogant authority.”[95]

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[93] Walker, *Our Mothers’ Gardens,* 213.

[94] Delores S. Williams, *Sister in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1993), 186.

[95] Tuzyline, J. Allan, *Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics*: *A Comparative Review* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press. 1995), 433-44.

Over the last two or three decades, religious scholars have focused on African American women to elaborate on the concept of womanist. The concept of womanist assumes that men and women can collaborate while maintaining their individualism, cultural beliefs and distinction. To be precise, the idea relates to African Americans whereby the "coexistence" of men provides women with an opportunity to address the various forms of gender oppression that have taken place in the Church and in society. Womanists applaud the rich beauty of the skin texture and the strength that is embodies by black womanhood. Womanist elevates black men and seeks connections and solidarity between men and women. Womanist Theology lifts the banner with Maya Angelou in her poetic ability to encourage and validate the beauty of black women. Maya Angelou encapsulates the poetic brilliance and essence of Womanist Theology in her historic poem "Still I Rise." One of the most powerful stanzas simply states:

> You may shoot me with your words, you may cut me with your eyes, you may kill me with your hatefulness, but still, like air, I'll rise.[96]

Womanist identifies and condemns sexism in the African American community and racism in the Eurocentric community. Shamase Maxwell states "Womanist differs significantly from feminism as the former seeks to identify and analyze sexism and racism critically; whereas feminism is just about advocacy of the rights for the women that is solely based on equality."[97] Womanist pastoral theology was birthed on black women's front porches as they shared stories

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[96] Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise," in *And Still I Rise*: *A Book of Poems* (New York, NY: Random House, 1978), accessed Janurary 20, 2022, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise.

[97] Shamase Z. Maxwell, "A Theoretical Exposition of Feminism and Womanism in African Context," *Gender and Behavior* 15, no. 2 (July 2017): 9181-9193, https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/EJC-b41951d6f#.

of how they overcame, in kitchens as they picked greens and string beans, in beauty shops as they got their hair done, in women's clubs and sororities, in black women's prayer closets, and in various "women's limited spaces" within the Black Church. In these spaces, black women came to know the love, mercy, and justice of God for themselves, they forged a theology which boldly affirms and exemplify that African American women are significant and valuable, not only to God but also to the Church and the world.

Womanist Theology speaks regarding the liberation of Black women, recognizing the love, mercy, and justice of God for themselves. Sheppard stated in her book *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* that "Womanist practical theology must recognize the specific needs of the black women, resists the impact of dehumanizing black women, and celebrating the ongoing transformation of black women and the contexts in which they live."[98]

> Carroll Watkins Ali quotes a statement from Walker regarding what it means to be womanist. "Committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I am Canada, and I am taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time.[99]

Walker clearly expresses that the womanist approach does not support any type of oppression which threatens the survival and limits the ability of Black people as a whole. Walker highlights how skin color should never shape or categorize who we are as a people. Colorism in the African-American community led to light-skinned blacks treating their darker

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[98] Sheppard, *Self, Culture and Other,* 187.

[99] Carroll Watkins Ali, *Survival and Liberation: Pastoral Theology in African American Context* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 7.

counterparts in the same discriminatory fashion as whites have treated all people of color for generations. According to her, this type of negative stereotypes in our communities, and in "sisterhoods," limits progress as a people. Womanist recognizes the beauty of the black male seeking connections and solidarity within the black community. Watkins-Ali proposed that “it’s time for a new paradigm shift that is liberating, and that God sees the African Americans struggle to be free from oppression. This liberation is for African Americans to resist systematic oppression and learn through pastoral care to recover the self which is a psychological recovery from pain and suffering brought on by racism, sexism, and classism that women have to cope with on a regular basis.”[100]

Although the ideologies presented in both books are relevant and important, they seem to overemphasize certain elements. Both present women as being oppressed and denied the opportunities to flourish. In doing so, the books impart the notion that we neglect the people who have the potential to deliver salvation for the African-American communities. In a real sense, both men and women face oppression, with the difference being the degree to which they experience it. These differences cannot be attached to gender alone as other factors such as culture, religion, and shared beliefs also contribute to it. This means that the opinions provided by both Walker and Watkins Ali are based on relatively modern thoughts regarding past events. Both books strive to empower the black woman, family, church, and the world. From their work it is clear that both writers could be perceived as feminists, and they present an ideology that men, black men, in this case are responsible for the women's marginal position in society by depriving them of the rights to articulate themselves. This view, to some extent, is biased as it

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[100] Watkins Ali, *Survival and Liberation*, 53.

does not consider women's view of themselves as dependents. It is, therefore, not fair to state women's marginalization as just a male discourse. Rather, the issue should be subjected to a broader discussion that incorporates women-specific issues to legitimize the argument.

Watkins Ali asked in her article *Strategies for Pastoral care in African American Communities, "*if the church has lost sight of the people and if it has failed to adequately address the collective survival and liberation issues of Black Americans." Watkins Ali proposed that "we must get the Church in order" which means we have to address the subject of sexism and pastoral care in the Black Church."[101] The role of Black women in the church has been marginalized, even though they are the primary contributors; the majority of leadership remains male dominant. In my present denomination, Black male ministers continue to perpetuate the silent voice in addressing the leadership role of women in the Church. It is imperative to develop a conversation with my congregation and colleagues on the Biblical support of equality in the Church. One way to implement this conversation is to emphasize the importance of treating black women with the same respect as men. This means that women who feel called by God for ministry must be given the same opportunities for leadership positions as pastor, bishop etc. Second, the Church must eliminate from its theology the use of exclusionist language, and such attitudes and practices from its theology.

The writings of both Walker and Watkins Ali elaborated a womanist theology that focused on religious doctrines, leadership, and the roles of women in society. Their works show us the multiple ways in which there has been systematic exclusion of women. Both authors'

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[101] Watkins Ali, *Survival and Liberation,* 96.

writings showed a connection between African-American women and their struggle to identify themselves and claim their position and value in the community. The emerging issue they both presented was oppression of women as the result of several factors. Walker presented men as the dominating factor and depicted women as both socially and economically at a disadvantage. In their works, Walker and Watkins Ali showcased the role that women can play in the community. This role is seen through the validation of the writers' past encounters that serve to remind, reaffirm, and appreciate their contributions.

In a real sense, both men and women face oppressions that are not limited to gender but also include bigotry, racism, classism, discrimination, and economic inequality which come from the wider culture and are often justified by appeals to religion. Racism, classism, gender bias, and economic inequality is the everyday reality of shared by African American women and men. It is also important to remember that womanism recognizes the beauty of the black male and seeks to promote connections and solidarity within the black community. Womanist was born to empower black women and to encourage them to share their stories of successes and failure. It is theology that affirms black women's lives are significant and valuable. Womanist Theology also promotes community wellness, spirituality, and self-determination for black women as equal partners with men to fight against injustice. In addition, it encourages women to recognize their strength and capabilities as leaders. The theory describes black women who are committed to humanity, socialization, and the well-being of male and female.

Marsha Foster Boyd discussed the importance of Womanist Care, which is to recognize "the narrative and voice in the healing and transformation process of African American

women."[102] Womanist Care encourages African American women to self- actualize, which is the ability to see themselves as the subject of the conversation, no longer the object. To find comfort and strength in their stories is essential for healing and transformation to occur. Hebrews 12:12, (NIV). The writer of the book of Hebrews exhorts the readers: "Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet that what is out of joint might be put in place." Boyd echoes this exhortation when she says that "lifting and straightening and strengthening is a part of the healing dimension of Womanist Care, so that women are able to help one another to overcome."[103] The goal of this process, as one woman is transformed, is that she reciprocates to influence others. It is the intentional ability to receive and give care to her circle. "In this process, the focus is the holistic care of the body, mind, and spirit in order that healing, and transformation occur for African American women and their circles of influence."[104]

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[102] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 198.

[103] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 201.

[104] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 198.

Chapter Four

We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: African American Clergywomen's Experiences

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the lived experiences of Black clergywomen who have overcome obstacles to achieve leadership positions in the Black Church. For an inordinate period of time Black women in the United States have struggled under a Eurocentric worldview that has been divisive, demeaning and oppressive, a view which has contributed to Black women's suppression. This study highlights the leadership journey of six Black clergywomen in various ecclesial leadership settings in pursuit of their critical calls, passions, and dreams.

The examination of these women's narratives was conducted from a womanist reference that, according to Mitzi J. Smith, "unapologetically prioritizes Black women's experiences, voices, traditions, and concerns as legitimate sources of dialogue and knowledge." Smith concludes that "a womanist perspective provides an intentional and contextual frame of reference to one's lived experience in the Black Church and surrounding communities."[105] Womanist theology embraces the concept of spirituality to release the chains of oppression and celebrate African American women's contribution in the Church, their communities and to society.

Womanist theologians relate their experiences as Black women to the story of Hagar, an ethic minority who was forced to conceive a child with the husband of her mistress. Womanist

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[105] Mitzi J. Smith, "Womanism, Intersectionality, and Biblical Justice," *Mutuality* 23, 2 (Summer 2016 Gender Justice 101): 8-11, https://www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/womanism.pdf.

theologians point to this story as one example of the intersections of racial and class oppression. However, Hagar received mercy and grace from God who "sees" her (Genesis 16:13). Womanist preachers attempt to emphasize the interwoven dimensions of identities, and therefore develop a more inclusive theology to ensure that Biblical interpretations no longer keep any group of people in a spirit of oppression.

To illustrate how Black clergywomen have connected with the stained-glass ceiling, I present a brief representation of pioneer black clergywomen and their challenges as they endeavored to gain spiritual leadership. Their lives and affirmation for clergy recognition have assisted in fostering an intersectional theology that highlights Black women's experiences. These great clergywomen have exemplified what Marsha Foster Boyd refers to as an "empowered cojourner," which is "the ability to understand that through one's life, through one's hurts, through one's victories, one has the power to cojourn with others."[106] The word "cojourner" was developed by Cecelia William Bryant who indicates that a "cojourner" is a person (or persons) whom "heaven has summoned to journey with us. They are "spiritual companions brought together on a common path for a particular time."[107] The idea of a "cojourner" has been demonstrated by Black clergywomen who have broken through the stained-glass ceiling of male machismo, traditional practices, cultural bias, and systemic oppression.

In the book *The Woman in the Pulpit*, Carol M. Noren, says "seeing another woman in the pulpit has the effect of raising a sort of mirror to the woman preacher. It causes her to

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[106] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 200.

[107] Boyd, "WomanistCare," 200.

compare her own work with this other person who like her and yet not like her, to reflect on how she has grown and what she may become."[108] Noren raises the point that women bring the beauty and charisma that only a masculine role can only mock, "due to the laughter, solemnity, tension, and other moods which come across in such a way that only a woman preacher can personify."[109] The Bible speaks of the beauty of women when it says "You are fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:15 NKJV).

Profiles

This intergenerational group of contemporary Black clergywomen consists of accomplished pastors, a Bishop, authors, and seminary administrators. They are: Bishop Vashti McKenzie; Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon; Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale; Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart; Rev. Dr. Renita Weems; and Rev. Dr. Claudette Copeland. The participants were located throughout the United States in Texas, Tennessee, and Georgia. All the women have served as clergywomen in the Black Church in many different capacities. The denominations represented in the project are African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Baptist, Presbyterian, and non-denominational. The Black clergywomen range in age from 60-75 and their years in ministry leadership ranged from 25-45 years. All the women are ordained ministers who have served the Church in their local communities as well as regionally, statewide, and on the national level. Three of the six women serve as senior pastors; one is a co-pastor, author, and administrator; one is a professor and evangelist; and one is a retired bishop.

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[108] Carol M. Noren, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 30.

[109] Noren, *Woman in the Pulpit*, 34.

Bishop Vashti McKenzie

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie "was elected 117th bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Her historic election in 2000 was the first time in over 200-year history of AME Church that a woman has obtained this episcopal office. In addition, she served as President of the Council of Bishops, Chair of the General Conference Commission, and was the first woman to host Bishops for the 49th Session of General Conference of the AME Church. Bishop McKenzie was appointed by President Barack Obama to serve on the inaugural President's Advisory Council of the White House Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships."[110] Additionally, she is the author of five books. Bishop McKenzie was speaking to the 2006 graduating class at Central State University in Ohio when she said, "You have been prepared to be critical thinkers . . . open your eyes and seek new ideas . . . find new ways to explore new spiritual frontiers."[111] Her message was a ray of hope for new minds that desire to follow the path of their calling into ministry. Bishop McKenzie has administrative responsibilities for over two hundred AME Churches across Texas, which includes Paul Quinn College. "She is known as an electrifying preacher and has been honored for her leadership, community service, and outstanding achievements by a number of civic, educational, business, and governmental organizations and

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[110] "Vashti Murphy McKenzie, Speaker at Benedict College," Millennium Magazine, accessed February 2, 2022, https://www.millmag.org/vashti-murphy-mckenzie-speaker-at-benedict-college/.

[111] Yussuf Simmonds, "Bishop Vashti McKenzie," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 24, 2008, https://lasentinel.net/bishop-vashti-mckenzie.html?msclkid=d21085ceb1f311ec9ab99c716d96e052.

leaders in the world. In 2015, The Huffington Post named her one of the 50 most powerful female religious leaders in the world."[112] In her book *Journey to Well*, she offers women a Christian path to personal transformation as she discusses the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Bishop Vashti McKenzie is a trailblazer for clergywomen regarding her ability to "trust in the Lord with all her heart, do not depend on your own understanding" Proverbs 3:5. (NIV).

Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon

Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon was a pioneer and legend in the Presbyterian Church. "She represents the best of contemporary scholarship through her use of "down home" southern African American culture shaped by a strong sense of connections to contemporary womanist theology. As the first African American woman ordained in the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., she represented the power of faith and love despite the tensions of both race and gender struggles within the denomination and the academy."[113] For Dr. Cannon, ordination was monumental to the denomination and the African American community. She has been a pioneer and witness to the biblical call to make disciples of all nations. "She dared to believe that African American woman from rural North Carolina could enter an overwhelmingly white theological academy and make a difference. Dr. Cannon was the founder of the Center for Womanist Leadership, and she was a pioneer in the study and work of womanist theology and ethics. She lectured nationally and internationally and was the

[112] Millennium Magazine, "Vashti Murphy McKenzie, Speaker."

[113] Gail Strange, "The Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon Dies," Presbyterian News Service, August 9, 2018, https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/the-rev-dr-katie-geneva-cannon-dies/.

author and editor of numerous articles and books. She received a Bachelor of Science from Barber-Scotia College, a Master of Divinity from Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary, and both her Master and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Union Theological Seminary in New York City."[114] Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon was a woman of valor who transcended the norm and executed a change that left many in a state of awe. Furthermore, she transcended the stained-glass barriers of oppression in the Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale

Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale is the Pastor of the Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia. She began her ministry meeting for Bible study in her home. "Her megachurch has grown to over 5,100 which is a profound achievement that is unheard of among African-American women in a world where race and gender remain challenging to leadership in and out of the church. Hale speaks openly about the trade-offs she lives with as a result of the choices she made early in her ministry. She has been in ministry for thirty-six years. She attended Hollins College in Virginia where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Music; Master of Divinity from Duke University and a Doctor of Ministry from United University Theological Seminary."[115] Dr. Hale faced many challenges along the way, including those who questioned her call. Hale said "Some tried to shut my dreams down, but I've always

[114] Strange, "The Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon."

[115] Ken Garfield, "Ray of Hope,*"* Faith & Leadership, January 19, 2009, https://faithandleadership.com/ray-hope.

believed that I, along with other people, could change the world for Christ."[116] Hale struggled with accepting the call to preach and said, "I had not seen any women do that at that time."[117] Dr. Cynthia Hale is a recipient of numerous awards and achievements. "She was determined to use her pulpit to end the racism she' felt was pervasive."[118] Hale served on the President's Commission on White House Fellowships, appointed by President Barack Obama. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated. "In her book *I am a Piece of Work! Sisters Shaped by God Rev.* Hale discusses her own struggle in order to help other women realize and celebrate uniqueness, acknowledge without shame, issues and challenges, and receive healing and forgiveness."[119] Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale epitomized the standards for clergywomen and is a woman who stands firm in her beliefs and was able to make a difference.

Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart

Rev. Dr. Gina Maria Stewart is a woman with a mission, dynamic preacher, builder, motivator, professor, and Pastor of Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. She is the first African American woman elected to serve at the historical church in Memphis Tennessee.

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[116] "Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale," African Amerian Heritage House at Chautauqua, accessed January 31, 2022, https://www.aaheritagehouse.org/rev-dr-cynthia-l-hale.

[117] Cynthia L. Hale, *I'm a Piece of Work! Sisters Shaped by God,* edited by Kathryn V. Stanley **(**King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 80.

[118] African Amerian Heritage House, "Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale."

[119] Hale, *I'm a Piece of Work,* 90.

"A native of Memphis, Stewart has been in ministry for over 20-years. She attended the University of Memphis, earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing. She then earned a Master of Education from Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, and a Master of Divinity degree from Memphis Theological Seminary. She earned her Doctor of Ministry degree from the Interdenominational Theological Center."[120] She is a woman of excellence who was "elected as the first woman president of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society, marking the first time a woman has been chosen for the highest post of a Black Baptist organization. She succeeded the last president who led a society which dates back to 1897. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated."[121] Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart exemplifies the fortitude for clergywomen regarding her ability to break the barriers with truth in the Black Baptist Church.

Rev. Dr. Renita Weems

"Rev. Dr. Renita Weems is the Co-Pastor of the Ray of Hope Community Church in Nashville Tennessee. She is a biblical scholar, academic administrator, writer, blogger, ordained minister, and public intellectual

[120] "Our Senior Pastor: Reverend Dr. Gina Maria Stewart," Christ Missionary Baptist Church, accessed February 14, 2022, https://www.christmbc.org/our-story/our-senior-pastor.

[121] Chris Karnadi, "Gina M. Stewart: Everyone needs an advocate, Especially Women Leaders," Faith and Leadership, June 11, 2019, 1-7, https://faithandleadership.com/gina-m-stewart-everyone-needs-advocate-especially-women-leaders.

whose scholarly insight into everyday lives makes her a much sought-after writer and speaker."[122] She has been in ministry for thirty-three years and is ordained an elder in the AME Church. She attended Wellesley College, where she earned a Bachelor's degree, and then later she completed a Master's degree and a PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary. She has written numerous books and articles. In one of her acclaimed books, *Just a Sister Away*, she makes the "audacious attempt to probe beneath the surface on biblical texts to discover a place for everyone in the kingdom."[123] "Dr. Weems was the first African American woman to earn a PhD in Old Testament and Hebrew Bible. Weems grew up in a strict Pentecostal faith which had limited opportunities for women in ministry. She left the Pentecostal faith along the way, joining a Methodist Church in Boston."[124] Rev. Dr. Renita Weems is a commander and chief for clergywomen regarding her academic accomplishments and her ability to share her pain and struggles with other women. She is a fearless trailblazer of hope and fortitude.

Rev. Dr. Claudette Copeland

Rev. Dr. Claudette Copeland is a native of Buffalo, New York. She is the Pastor of New Creation Christian Fellowship in San Antonio, Texas. "She received her Bachelor's Degree in education from the University of

[122] Renita J. Weems, "Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems," Howard University Memorial Chapel, accessed February 8, 2022, https://chapel.howard.edu/speaker-schedule/speaker-profiles/rev-dr-renita-j-weems.

[123] Renita J. Weeks, *Just a Sister Away* (NY: Warner Books), 8.

[124] Carol Brennan, "Weems, Renita J. 1954–," Contemporary Black Biography, Encyclopedia.com, accessed January 28, 2022, https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/weems-renita-j-1954.

Connecticut, Master of Divinity from the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia and Doctorate of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. Copeland is the founder of Claudette Copeland Ministries, a national enrichment group for women."[125] She is a sought-after speaker, both nationally and internationally, who has a passion for work with emotionally damaged women. "She grew up in the Church of God and Christ which had limited opportunities for women in ministry. Dr. Copeland lives and ministers by the power of the Holy Spirit! She served in a variety of ministry settings including the Hospital Chaplaincy, mission fields in Haiti, South Africa, Ghana, Liberia, and Kenya. Copeland was a commissioned officer in the U.S. Air Force Chaplaincy. In fact, she and her husband were the first African-American clergy couple in the history of the U.S. Military Chaplaincy. She is a published author, a powerful preacher, and a servant and a lover of God's people."[126] Her book *Coming Through the Darkness: Cancer and One Woman's Journey to Wholeness* is an inspiring and motivating story for women in a dark place in their lives. Copelands says, "This book is a story of feelings, thoughts and private reactions which may mirror your own while you are groping in the dark. It affirms that we are all more alike than we are different, and that we desperately need one another's kindness. No one makes it out of darkness alone."[127] Rev. Dr. Copeland is a phenomenal example to clergywomen regarding her ability to speak to the pain

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[125] "The Reverend Dr. Claudette A. Copeland," Heal the Healer San Antonio, accessed February 14, 2022, https://hthsanantonio.com/claudette-copeland/.

[126] "Claudette Copeland," The Kingdom Council, accessed November 29, 2021, https://www.kingdomcouncil.net/rev-dr-claudette-a-copeland.

[127] Claudette Copeland, *Coming Through the Darkness*: *Cancer and One Woman's Journey to Wholeness* (San Antonio, TX: Destiny Press, July 14, 2000), 5.

and suffering women face. She boldly stepped forward and embodied the courage needed to make change.

Research Review

The themes advanced from the research analysis have provided a glance into the lives of six African American clergywomen who shared their perceptions and experiences of politics, church doctoring, and ideology of major leadership found in the Black Churches. The leadership styles and ministry objectives of these clergywomen were developed based on their life-changing experiences. Their backgrounds are encouraging and motivational for any aspiring women who feel called into ministry. These clergywomen are role models attesting to divine grace in their lives and ministries. They also lived the passage from the book of Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (29:11, NIV). These women have found leadership opportunities within the Church and challenged gendered symbolism.

Some of the women share stories that reflect their struggles with a lack of confidence and insecurities they had experienced when entering into ministry; they expressed how these feelings acted as obstacles to be overcome. Confidence is a major factor when answering the call to ministry and it is imperative to find the necessary strength in the Lord to overcome the challenges associated with clergy leadership. Their stories include rejection, traditional bias from the Church, and lack of support from male clergy leaders. The oppression and denial left several of the women frustrated and disappointed, but they never gave up on God and their call. One of the women stated, "If God is before us, who can be against us" (Roman 8:31, NKJV). It is imperative that clergywomen in leadership have certain attributes which include being a servant, self-confident, and staying true to the call. Paul's letters always begin with

referring to himself as a servant of Christ. Having these attributes were major contributors in obtaining clergy leadership positions. Through possessing these qualities, the women were able to overcome hindrances associated with the clergy position. All six of the women noted, that having a relationship with God, education, training, and having a support system were all necessary factors in preparing them for a leadership position in the church.

My analysis of the biographies of these six influential clergywomen and their liberating resistance to oppression in an ecclesial setting is approached through the lens of womanist theology by reviewing their life experiences. In her book *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community,* Katie Cannon argues that "the task of womanist theology includes 'unmasking' the patriarchy of Black religious traditions while 'disentangling' affirmations for Black women found there."[128] These six clergywomen have done just that by breaking through the stained-glass ceiling of male dominance in many of their denominational practices which have contributed to the success of these women's experiences.

Rev. Gina Stewart shares her experiences as the first African American Pastor of a traditional African American Baptist congregation in Memphis. "During an interview on June 11, 2019, published in the journal *Faith & Leadership* she shared how they were OK with me as a minister, but the idea of me becoming their pastor, and their [senior] pastor, was a bit more than they could handle. Rev. Stewart understands the struggle of a woman in church leadership and wants to 'move the needle' for other women leaders especially those in environments where

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[128] Katie G. Cannon, "The Wounds of Jesus: Justification of Goodness in the Face of Manifold Evil," in *Katie's Cannon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community (*New York, NY: Continuum, 1995), 109-10.

senior leadership is not supportive of their call."[129] Rev. Stewart captures the essence of this project when she frames the term "moving the needle" meaning to amplify their voices, highlighting their gifts, and being an advocate for them. She also suggested the importance of having an advocate. During her interview, Rev. Stewart was asked, "what do you think men should do to help move the needle?" She said that they should "be willing to take some of the bullets, because there is a cost in some contexts for embracing, affirming, and empowering women. Next, be willing to have the courage to speak up when women are silenced."[130] Rev. Stewart is very encouraging to women who are facing opposition in leadership. This is the environment wherein you must face some hard decisions to stay or explore other opportunities. You must evaluate your spiritual giftedness and navigate the internal and external challenges of ministry.

Clergywomen must recognize that they carry the word of God both in their Bible and in themselves through their life altering stories. Their experiences revealed a pursuit to persevere in a profession wherein the very words they use to inspire others are often used to discourage them from their own destiny. However, despite any disappointment or discouragement faced on their journey, the six clergywomen's narratives for this project shared a similar passion for the call and in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry. There was a consensus among the participants that the call of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit were the driving forces that kept them forging ahead in the face of oppression and adversity. The call of God is the spirit of

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[129] Karnadi, "Everyone needs an advocate," 1-7.

[130] Karnadi, "Everyone needs an advocate," 9.

God that compels men and women to do God's will using innate gifts and talents uniquely given to them by God.

Teresa Fry Brown, in her book *Can A Sistah Get A Little Help*, recalls some of the hurtful comments that church members make about women in ministry: "Women are not supposed to preach, she is trying to be a man, what does her husband think? Child, I remember when she was in the choir, that's why she can't get a man: she's got to run everything," She's going straight to hell, going against God, can't no women tell me anything; all they do is run their mouths. She might be able to preach but she can't pastor or something similar."[131] Everyone seems to have an opinion about a woman in ministry but only few will confront the call of a man. Unfortunately, some of these attitudes seem to prevail even in the twenty-first century. Despite the opposition, clergywomen are rewriting the discourse of patriarchal ecclesiology by reinterpreting the role of women in the church.

Rev. Dr. Renita Weems discusses her journey and the opposition she grew up with in the strict Pentecostal faith regarding women in ministry. The Pentecostal faith had strict rules for women: no cosmetics or jewelry, and women were encouraged to dress modestly. Weems abandoned the Pentecostal faith and joined African Methodist Episcopal Church where she was ordained. "When I was ordained, I endured the mocks and jeers of family, friends, and male ministers in order to be ordained and I had nothing to look forward to but small assignments. Instead, Weems went on to a career as an author who could reach for more listeners."[132] Dr.

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[131] Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Can A Sistah Get A Little Help* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008) 6.

[132] Brennan, "Weems, Renita J. 1954–."

Weems is a trailblazer and a breath of encouragement as she cracks the stained-glass ceiling of male dominance. Weems is an advocate for clergywomen and offers the strength and fortitude to stand up under the ridicule and the belief that women should not participate nor stand beyond the sacred lectern that reads "Men Only." "When she wrote the book *Listening for God,* she addresses the believer's yearning for God through periods of inconstancy, vacillation, and disenchantment. Weems offers a beacon of light for all believers struggling to listen for God amidst the din of worldly demands and distractions."[133] Weems reminds us that women's sensitivity is a sign of hope and liberating interpretation of the scripture. All six participants expressed how they had a strong support system comprised of family, sister friends, and members of their congregations when they decided to pursue ministry. Several of the participants emphasize how a strong support system was a major contributor in their journey.

[133] Weems, *Listening for God*, 25.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Future Recommendations

In the twenty-first century, there remains significant opposition to women obtaining leadership positions within traditional Black Churches. In order to oppose these oppressive systems, one must maintain a life of prayer, discernment, and a tenacious spirit, recognizing that ministry is not for the faint of heart. Jesus came to set the captives free and crack the stain-glass ceiling of oppression, racism, sexism, and the diverse understanding of biblical texts. It's imperative that clergywomen adopt the spirit of Jarena Lee which was discussed in chapter two. Lee recognizes that she was called to service the Body of Christ by a power higher than herself.

One of the goals of this project was to encourage and motivate the silent voices of oppressed women by sharing their stories, gleam from the life and experience of biblical women, and to explore the lived experiences of Black clergywomen who have achieved leadership positions in the Black Church.

This study collected participant narratives which aligned with the literature review and acknowledged that the advancement of women is hindered by patriarchal social norms. The findings of this study established that Black clergywomen experienced joys, pains, triumphs, and disappointments on their journey but the call of God on their lives continued to be the driving force that kept them motivated even in the face of adversity. Karen Baker-Fletcher calls this force the "Dance of God," which is inspired by relationship with the Holy Spirit. It is the ability to make movement with your body that commemorate losses, pain, hatred, and oppression,

"while simultaneously celebrating survival, the power of healing, and resurrection hope."[134] Fletcher says the "dance" is symbolic, but it is grounded in heritage and the movement of the body is an expression of worshiping God. The Bible says, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord" (Psalm 100). Next, it is a victory dance that thanks God for the ancestors that have deposited into your life. Fletcher speaks powerful words to clergywomen and women who feel their voices have been silenced, to recognize their contribution, strength, tenacity, and that they're a gift. "All things, including ourselves, exist to serve each other, in service to God."[135] Clergywomen are instruments for God's glory.

My goal for this project was to review scriptures that supported clergywomen and to avoid statements which gave the appearance of discrimination or the impression that there are social roles for which one gender is more suitable than the other. The best way to begin this life-altering mind set of inclusion is for women and men to embrace a new form of theology which fosters the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus, which is liberation for all. After reviewing the life experience of each participant, there was a clear recommendation resounding in their writing that women actively involved in Church and aspiring for clergy leadership position to stand firm, true to the call from God, being confident, attending seminary, and having a servant heart with love and compassion for people.

The findings from this project will present four recommendations for professional practice. The first recommendation will be to provide mentorship programs for Black

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[134] Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006).

[135] Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 44.

clergywomen who aspire to lead and encourage clergywomen to write their stories as a roadmap for other aspiring leaders. The mentorship program can be established in African American Churches to discern solidarity and build a sense of community. Developing solidarity will require a facilitator who can find the time and place for women to meet, where they can intentionally gather in a safe space and hear each other's stories. This mentorship program would allow clergywomen and those who desire to go into ministry to see someone of their same gender, who has the same uniqueness, and address the negative stereotypes that have been cast upon clergywomen. The group will also be a safe space for women who have sat silently in the pew under clergymen who refuse to take the necessary steps to license and ordain them.

The next recommendation will be to encourage male pastors to step out on faith to break the stained-glass ceiling of oppression by developing open form dialogue which address this pressing issue regarding women who desire to go into ministry and clergywomen. One shift occurring in the twenty-first century is that some women are feeling empowered and are able to articulate their calling to ordained ministry in a supportive environment. This development has led many men to enter into a more inclusive learning experience wherein they are listening and taking seriously the voices and work of women. These experiences have built new bridges of change for men and women across traditional boundaries that have historically hindered women from accepting their call to serve God. This is an important linkage to break through the stained-glass ceiling of patriarchy/hierarchy into which most African American males have been socialized to believe in.

Next will be to develop a Church leadership institution for African American women which will be a 3-month course of study designed to offer women the opportunity to enhance their leadership abilities as well as improving their skills and knowledge through in-class

instruction, independent study, coaching pods, and case studies. The setup will be a non-traditional classroom setting, allowing the students to be interactive during discussions. The four core modules will be given throughout the program which will allow for personal growth and implementation of new skills.

The goal of the church leadership program institution would be to allow clergywomen to grow deeper in their faith journey with the Lord and to serve passionately and effectively as pastors, bishops, administrators, and ordained ministers. The mission is to provide a safe environment in which to disciple women, to provide opportunities for them to develop their giftedness, and to equip each woman with the skills to reach her leadership potential. In addition, the institute will be a place where women can have open and honest dialogue, contemplate, and time to apply biblical truths to relevant issues they face in ministerial, personal, and societal levels.

The four core modules will be as follows:

1. **Equipping women for effective leadership** – This module will start with building a biblical framework for women serving in ministry. It will determine the needs, resources, challenges, and opportunities to sustain meaningful ministry. Additionally, it will review the essential components for developing servant leaders by discussing "The 7 Abilities of Emotionally Intelligent Leaders" by John Loblack.[136] Lastly, time will be spent on the practical application of these principles to enhance each woman's leadership abilities.

[136] John Loblack, "The 7 Abilities of Emotionally Intelligent Leaders," Linkedin, February 26, 2020, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-abilities-emotionally-intelligent-leaders-dr-john-loblack/.

2. **Understanding God in leadership** – This module is designed to help women grow in their understanding of God and themselves by renewing their minds to be effective leaders. The group will review the book of Nehemiah to observe his leadership skills and how he was an effective leader in times of national crisis. In addition, powerful women of the Bible and the lessons they offer will be examined.
3. **Characteristics of an effective leader –** This module will review the definition of leadership, characteristics of a leader, leadership principles, historical women leaders, and how to lead with purpose as an effective communicator. This module will also include practical training wherein women will do personal work to exam their giftedness and direction for ministry.
4. **Passing the baton –** This module will include inviting women who have been trailblazers as pastors, bishops, professors, authors, and evangelists to speak into the lives clergywomen through sharing their successes, failures, disappointments, and accomplishments. Alice Walker, spoke of the significance of cherishing trailblazers who fought for social change and equality for African American women: clergywomen who have stories to share of how they cracked the stained-glass ceiling of oppression and sexism in the Church. These clergywomen are role models attesting to the divine grace that has been in their lives and ministers. They are clergywomen who continue to pour back into the lives of others in their communities and congregations.

The final recommendation will be for future researchers to conduct a study to evaluate Church doctrine, by-laws, traditional practices, and changes that have occurred over time that benefit or should benefit Black clergywomen. Included in the study will be interviews from male clergy and their perspectives on the study regarding positive changes that possibly have

occurred in their Churches regarding clergywomen. Adding the male clergy perspective will bring balance to the conversation.

This study sought to crack the stained-glass ceiling of a male patriarchal system that silenced the voices of women who have sat in the pews for far too long under the oppression of black male machismo, racism, sexism, and oppressive interpretations of biblical texts. One of the goals of this project was to review and respond to the teachings, traditions, and practices in the Black Baptist Churches which have led to the exclusion of women from ordained ministry, as well as from ecclesial practices such as pastoral leadership and proclamation. In addition, this study sought to be a source of empowerment to help women and men understand the importance of recognizing the leadership qualities that African American women have, and that they have been called and commissioned by God to take their rightful positions in the Body of Christ as pastors, bishops, professors, authors, evangelists, and ordained women of God.

It is imperative to consider the recommendations which have been given to cultivate an increased opportunity for organizational changes in Black Church leadership practices for women. Furthermore, it is imperative that the Church implement these recommendations by recognizing the importance of equality and "becoming a new creation in Christ" in which there is "neither male or female" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV). Embracing these changes would enable the Black Church to embark upon a more inclusive ministry wherein all are recognized for their gifts.

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